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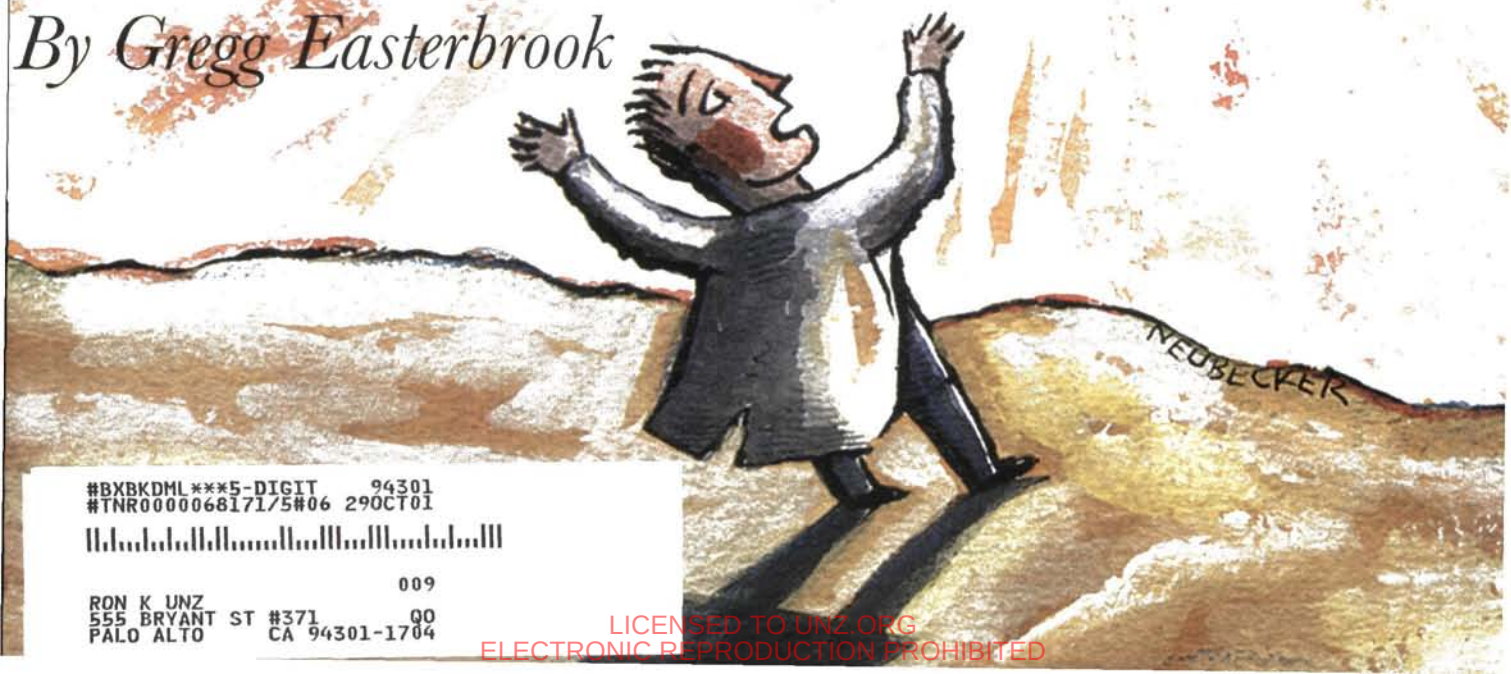
THE NEW REPUBLIC

Margaret Talbot: Clinton's Feminists • Dana Milbank: Blumenthal vs. Himself

Science Sees the Light

The Big Bang, DNA, and the Rediscovery of Purpose in the Modern World

By Gregg Easterbrook



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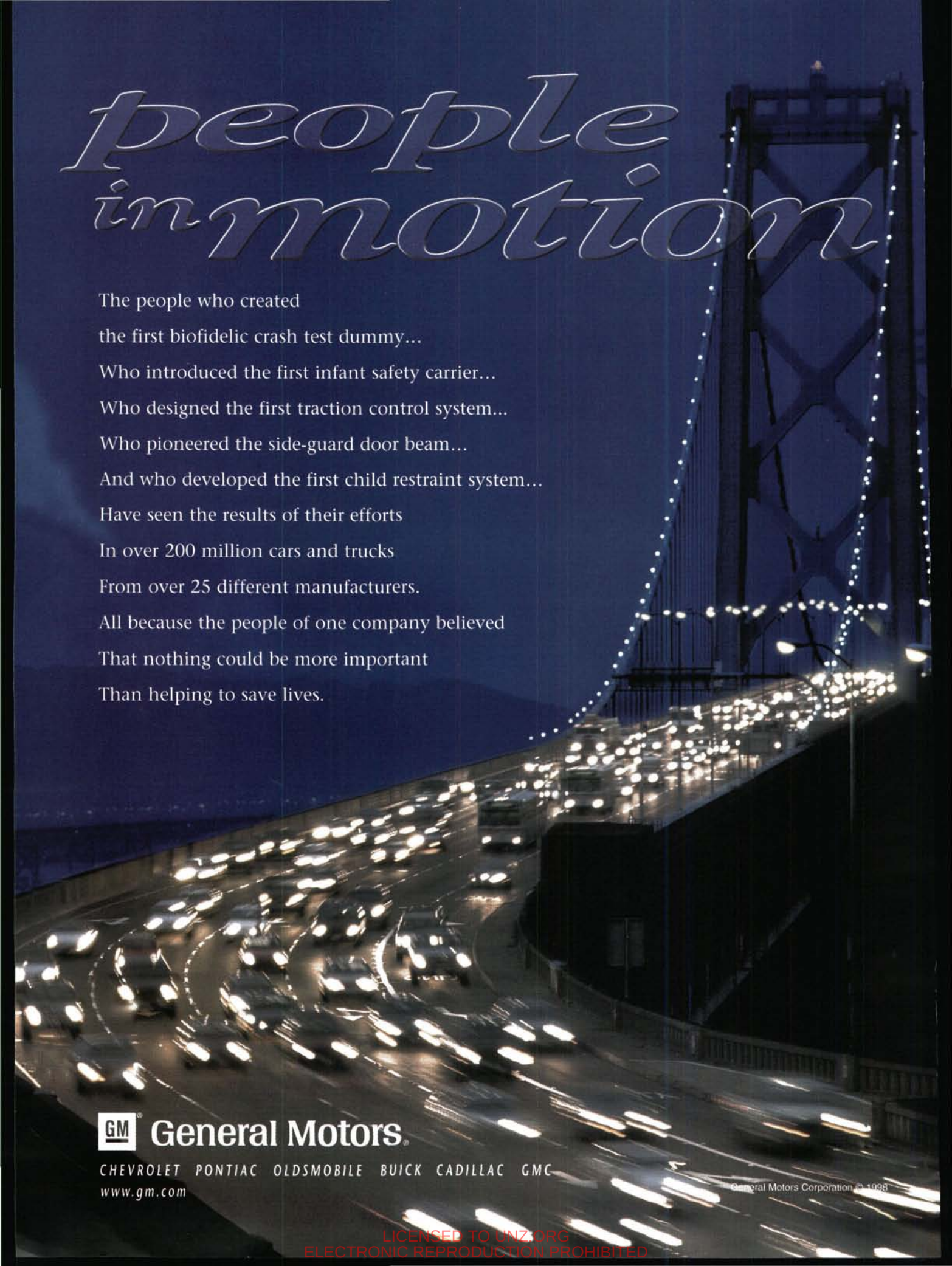
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OCTOBER 12, 1998

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CORRESPONDENCE

The spirit of '68

To the editors:
John B. Judis makes a valid point in arguing that much of what is attributed to the counterculture by its critics should instead be placed at the door of consumer capitalism ("The Spirit of '68," August 31). But I take umbrage at his characterization of me as a "Weatherman sympathizer." Judis would have better described me as a "Weatherman critic." In the book I edited on Weatherman, I included several of my own criticisms of the organization (as well as those by Todd Gitlin, David Horowitz, and other writers). If Judis wished to illustrate the Weatherman state of mind, he should have quoted from Weatherman sources, not from an article I wrote on Herbert Marcuse in which Weatherman was never mentioned.

HAROLD JACOBS
New Paltz, New York

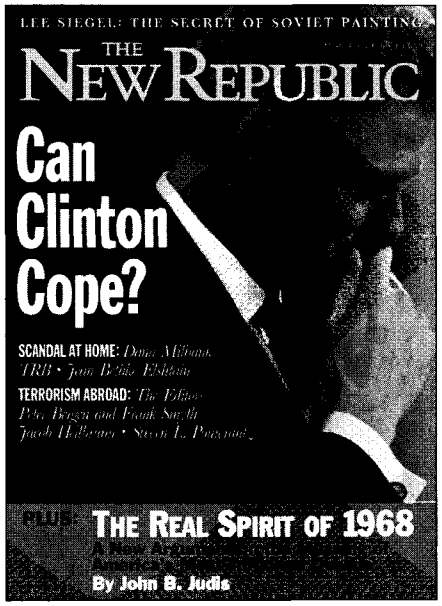
John B. Judis replies:
The passage I quoted did not illustrate Jacobs's attitude toward Weatherman but toward America's future—an apocalyptic view he shared with Weatherman. Jacobs's anthology, published by Ramparts in 1971, contained scattered tactical criticisms, but he himself evinced unmistakable sympathy for these "mother country revolutionaries" who brought "courage" and "moral authority" to their infamous Days of Rage protest in Chicago. "Owing to Weatherman's effort and those it has inspired," he wrote, "there is hardly a symbol of racist and imperialist oppression secure from violent attack."

To the editors:
While John B. Judis justifiably inventories and applauds the major successes of the Sixties that continue into our time (i.e., the civil rights, environmental, and consumer movements), he fails to adequately examine the major failures of the counterculture (i.e., drug use, sexual ideology, and greed), instead blaming them on "consumer capitalism." The counterculture was comprised primarily of adolescents, many of whom mixed naïveté and idealism with impetuosity and rebellious aggression. Their leaders were often musicians, heavily using and advocating heroin, cocaine, "speed," LSD, and other dangerous drugs, sometimes—as in the cases of Joplin and Hendrix—dying as a consequence. Think of the countless, nameless idealistic younger adolescents who followed (and still follow) these pied pipers over the cliffs!

FRED DINGS
Wichita, Kansas

To the editors:
John B. Judis is mistaken to claim that many of the changes in American society brought on by the Sixties were caused not by the counterculture but by consumer capitalism. What has altered American society most dramatically in recent years has been a move away from a culture based on traditional religious values of brotherly love and self-restraint toward one of narcissism and self-indulgence.

The biggest factor in this development has been the secularization of our public schools; the second biggest factor has


LEE SIEGEL: THE SECRET OF SOVIET PAINTING
THE NEW REPUBLIC
Can Clinton Cope?
SCANDAL AT HOME:
TERRORISM ABROAD:
PLUS: THE REAL SPIRIT OF 1968
By John B. Judis

been the development of television as a medium through which secular and relativistic values are reinforced.

BRET SCHUNDLER
Mayor
Jersey City, New Jersey

Terrorists at large

To the editors:
Steven L. Pomerantz notes, "Although both Kenya and Tanzania seem to be cooperating with the FBI, such unequivocal support from foreign governments is unusual," citing the failure of Greece and Saudi Arabia to cooperate with U.S. investigators after attacks on American citizens on their soil ("The Best Defense," August 31). Pomerantz should also have mentioned Yasir Arafat's Palestinian Authority, which has refused to assist the United States in the investigation into the murder of my daughter Alisa, age 20, who was killed—along with seven other innocent people—in a Palestinian Arab terrorist bombing in the Gaza Strip in 1995.

The Clinton administration has not protested the Palestinians' outrageous refusal to permit the FBI to investigate this murder of an American citizen. Nor has the administration criticized Arafat for sheltering Nabil Sharihi, the man identified by the Israeli government as the terrorist who "helped prepare [the] bomb" used in that attack.

If there is to be a credible defense against terrorism, there should be no double standard in the pursuit of terrorist killers. The United States should pursue Palestinian killers of Americans just as vigorously as it has pursued other killers of Americans abroad.

STEPHEN M. FLATOW
Jersey City, New Jersey

Reclaiming the District

To the editors:
If Maryland does not want to take back the District of Columbia, it's because reporters like your Dana Milbank are always giving the city a bum rap ("Take it Back," August 31). Milbank describes Washington as "a blighted town [with] poverty-stricken inhabitants." Milbank and your readers should know that Washington, D.C., according to the Tax Foundation, has the second-highest per capita income in the nation. And, far from blighted, it is one of the most beautiful and gracious cities in the world, as even the most casual visitor knows.

Milbank complains of his bad experience with the District's Department of Motor Vehicles. But what other city even has a department of motor vehicles? That is a state function, as is licensing professionals, running a Medicare system, running a university system—all functions that the D.C. government provides in addition to the regular municipal functions of picking up the trash and maintaining local roads.

Responsibility without authority generally leads to poor government. We could solve the governance problem by the simple expedient of returning the remaining portion of the District to the state of Maryland.

LAWRENCE H. MIREL
Washington, D.C.

Postmodernist pedigree

To the editors:
Richard Wolin correctly asserts that all philosophical camps must in the end use reason to advance political arguments ("The Anti-American Revolution," August 17 & 24). His linking of postmodern political thought with reactionary

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German anti-logocentrism, however, misdefines a vital part of the postmodern mission. While these two traditions may on the one hand share an aversion to Enlightenment liberalism, they do so for different reasons.

Heidegger rejected Western metaphysics and its logic as false reasoning. In place of metaphysics, Heidegger envisioned an "opening up" into a clearing where Being—and essential Germanness—would emerge. Enlightenment metaphysics stood as a feeble human substitute for Germany's emerging vital essence; reliance on metaphysics also prevented Being from being known.

The postmodern mission and its use of reason differ greatly from the German antirational tradition. Postmodern political thinkers deny an emerging essence and fear that essentialism tends toward irrational and oppressive political and philosophical regimes. In their effort to avoid essence, however, postmodernists don't surrender reason. Rather, they look to employ it. By interrogating all systems of logic and representation (including the Enlightenment and liberalism) with their eyes peeled for furthering justice and respect for difference, postmodernists question the misuse and misapplication of reason in an ongoing avoidance of vicious past monoliths.

WILLIAM F. LONGWITZ
Washington, D.C.

Richard Wolin replies:

I wish I could be as sanguine as William F. Longwitz that postmodernist attitudes toward reason are for the most part relatively benign. After all, in a 1977 interview, Michel Foucault went on record claiming that "reason is torture"; Jacques Derrida has made his name as an unrelenting critic of "logocentrism" or the "tyranny of reason"; and Jean-François Lyotard has publicly equated a desire for rational "consensus" with "terror." Are these claims not meant to be taken seriously?

Longwitz's defense of postmodern thought is by now a familiar one: posit a variety of sweeping, pseudo-radical epistemological claims, then, when cornered, pretend as though you are not rejecting reason outright, just trying to mollify its intrinsic shortcomings and excesses. Sorry, but I remain unconvinced.

Fair game

To the editors:

As one of the international election observers who witnessed the Cambodian election on July 26, my assessment of the Cambodian elections is consistent with that of your writer Anna Husarska ("The

continued on page 53

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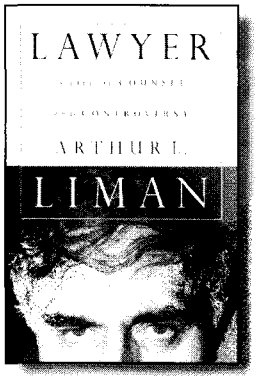

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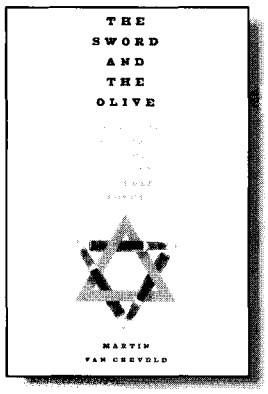

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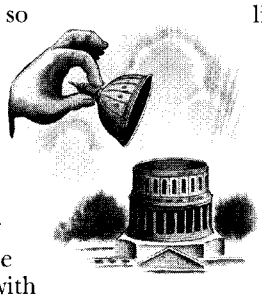
FROM WASHINGTON

School of scandal

It's a challenge to find a silver lining in the privacy-trampling, presidency-tarnishing national gross-out we've been living through, but I have one in mind. Maybe, over the next year or so, feminists will grow tired of being called hypocrites and begin to rethink their belief in the righteousness of legal remedies and political punishments for sexual boorishness. And, in so doing, maybe they will rediscover the feminist tradition of moral suasion, which has done so much to change our expectations of how men ought to behave toward women.

Thirty years ago, few American fathers took part in the care of their children on anything like an equal basis or even thought it a worthy goal to do so. Few Americans of either sex would have thought there was anything objectionable about a one-sided sexual relationship between an immensely powerful man and a swoony, self-deluding 22-year-old subordinate. But fathers do commit themselves to more egalitarian arrangements now, and people do think there might be something not only tacky but also exploitative about such a relationship. And the reason they think these things is, in large part, that feminism has convinced them—not so much through legislation as through patient explanation and urgent argument and the example of people who chose to order their lives differently than their parents did.



It would be absurd, of course, to argue that the feminist preoccupation with sexual harassment is the only, or even the main, force that propelled us to this point where so few of us want to be: watching the president in tight close-up, prompted by a relentless, disembodied voice to answer excruciatingly detailed questions about his sexual behavior. We're here because an unelected, overzealous, Clinton-hating special prosecutor seized in desperation on the pathetic tale of "the President" and "Ms. Lewinsky." We're here because Republicans on the Hill don't care enough about what might be thought of as the conservative virtues of protecting privacy and restricting the availability of sexually explicit material (and reining in the powers of the special prosecutor) to put partisanship on hold. And we're here, of course, because Clinton couldn't stop treating sex like take-out pizza and couldn't think of anything better to do when cornered than to lie in a deposition and then to the American people.

But it is also true that, without the sexual harassment suit of Paula Jones, without the relatively new legal principle by which an accused harasser's sexual history has become admissible evidence, and without the exposure of Clarence Thomas and Bob Packwood, Ken Starr would probably be molding young minds at Pepperdine today. And for this, feminists—at least those feminists who have made a priority of upholding and expanding sexual harassment law—can be held accountable. I don't have much faith in the intellectual regeneration of a Ken Starr or a Tom DeLay, but feminist theory is always evolving. Why not now, under the pressure of radically new circumstances?

Because here is the thing: Feminists don't really care about Clinton's sexual behavior. No spokesperson for any major feminist organization has been willing to say that Clinton's peccadilloes render him unfit for office, as many did say of both Thomas and Packwood. Time and again, prominent feminists have declined to condemn Clinton or have said explicitly that his pro-choice policies or his appointment of women to Cabinet positions matters far more than his regrettable tendency to drop trou and demand oral sex from women both willing and unwilling. "We're trying to think of the big picture, think about what's best for women," Eleanor Smeal, the president of the Feminist Majority Foundation, told *Vanity Fair*'s Marjorie Williams in May. "He's done all these good things, and on the policy side I'm in sync with his agenda," said Senator Barbara Boxer. That is a perfectly legitimate, even honorable, position. But it's a hard one to square with the idea that men "just don't get it"—don't get, that is, how very seriously they ought to regard the whole matter of sexual advances and innuendo in the workplace.

To finesse this contradiction, some of our leading feminists have offered

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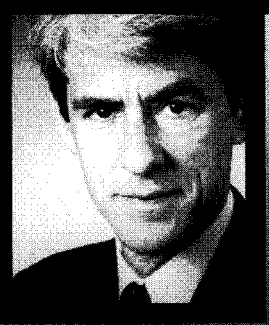
—Randy E. Barnett, Boston University School of Law

The welfare state rests on the assumption that people have the right to food, shelter, health care, retirement income, and other goods provided by the government. David Kelley examines the historical origins of that assumption, which, he shows, is deeply flawed. Welfare "rights," he argues, are incompatible with freedom, justice, and true benevolence, and they have damaged the genuine welfare of those who can least afford to become dependent on the government.



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THE NEW REPUBLIC

OCTOBER 12, 1998

PLAYING FAIR

What are we to make of President Clinton's four-hour filibuster with Ken Starr's prosecutors—and the public reaction to it? A television event that Republicans had loudly promised (and Democrats had loudly feared) would devastate the White House generated instead a modest bounce in the president's still preternaturally high job-approval ratings.

This can't be because the public actually believed what Clinton was telling the grand jury. On any reasonable view, his testimony was a mélange of legal evasions, half-truths, convenient memory lapses, and outright falsehoods. In that sense, the tape only confirmed the unappealing picture of the president that has emerged since his semi-repentant August 17 speech to the nation: namely, that he had baldly lied for seven months to everyone in America, from his own spouse and staff to the millions of ordinary folks who had supported him with their votes. And were we the only ones who shuddered when the president patronizingly referred to Monica Lewinsky as "a good girl"?

No, what converted this heavily hyped moment of doom into a bizarre political victory for Clinton were the off-camera voices of Ken Starr's minions, pressing the president on sexual details. Americans seemingly identified with the evasive Clinton, wriggling in the perjury trap, instead of with the truth-seekers who had set that trap. Perhaps the Republicans who insisted on releasing the videotape simply miscalculated: by the time the tape aired, the public already knew so much from the Starr report about cigars and God knows what else that there wasn't much shock value left in Clinton's testimony. The impact of *watching* him lie under oath before a grand jury was diminished by the fact that Americans already knew he had lied.

But the so-what reaction to the video also has to do with issues of procedural fairness. The House received Starr's impeachment charges amid admirable emanations about bipartisanship and sober deliberation. Within what seemed like minutes, though, Republicans on the Judiciary Committee were voting to put every salacious detail on the Internet. Breezily dispensing with such legal pleasantries as the traditional secrecy of grand jury testimony, Republicans argued that the public has a right to judge the evidence for itself—apparently meaning that it is entitled to do so before the representatives whom the Constitution charges with making a binding evaluation of such evidence have even voted to launch a formal impeachment inquiry, much less held a hearing.

To be sure, Clinton provoked both Starr and the Congress. Clinton hasn't exactly played straight with either of them, and his troops have done their share of scurrilous trashing of the prosecutors. Still, it's in the interest of Clinton's pursuers to revisit the advice Newt Gingrich gave everyone when the Starr report first came out: "Slow down and take a deep breath." Piqued as he may be about the stories of his own past sexual dalliances, and however much Gingrich may be hypocritically prodding him from behind the scenes, Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde needs to impose some restraint both on the release of prejudicial material and on the tenor of the debate in his committee.

For his part, Starr seems to have found no hard evidence of wrongdoing by the president in Whitewater, Travelgate, or Filegate. Indeed, *Newsweek* reports that the latter affair, which revolved around the Clinton White House's retention of FBI files on prominent Republicans, was just a "bureaucratic snafu"—precisely what the Clintonites contended all along. If the *Newsweek* story is true, then Starr should promptly say so, telling the public in writing what those "close" to him are so far only willing to whisper to the newsmagazines. If nothing else, that would lend credence to Starr's claims that he has indeed embarked on a fair investigation, and it would make his pursuit of Bimbroglio that much more legitimate, both in appearance and in fact.

Procedural legitimacy, real and perceived, is critical to whatever outcome—a censure deal, forced resignation, removal from office, or trial and acquittal—the seemingly inevitable impeachment process produces. Whether the public's muted reaction to Clinton's misdeeds is warranted or not, the fact remains that the Republicans are pursuing him in the face of strong public opposition. If last week proved anything, it is that the peremptory disclosure of even highly damaging material doesn't impress most Americans. Sobriety and seriousness might. •

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FEELING FINDINGS

Everyone was too busy reading the Starr report to notice it, but in a way the report issued by the Advisory Board to President Clinton's Initiative on Race was even more damning of this presidency. The race commission was ginned up months before anyone had even heard of Monica Lewinsky, back when the president's legacy was uncertain and he still entertained notions of leaving an unblemished one. But his commission's report succeeds only in expounding stale, softheaded rhetoric.

The report is a deeply pessimistic document. It dwells on America's "history of oppression, conquest, and private and government-sanctioned discrimination." It bemoans "the framework of racial hierarchy, discrimination, and domination with which we now contend as a Nation." While the race commission pays lip service to the notion that America has made impressive progress in remedying its racial problems, it finally deems those problems "seemingly intractable." Even the report's optimistic and laudable title, "One America in the 21st Century," is undercut by a footnote essentially apologizing to those who take offense at such a notion.

Of course, the race commission can strike these pessimistic notes because very little of the report deals with facts. The heartening story of racial progress—borne out by data showing marked increases in income and education levels for minorities over the past 40 years—goes largely untold. Instead, the race commission focuses on Americans' *feelings* about race, which are inherently fuzzy and subjective. "[I]t was hearing the personal experiences that had the most effect on us," the report remarks. Indeed, at times the report reads like the minutes of a 15-month encounter group. Personal experiences elicited in panel-sponsored "conversations" are presented like little nuggets of wisdom, even when, as wisdom, they are somewhat dubious.

Rather than challenge those who maintain that America's racial situation has not changed meaningfully over the past 40 years, the report coddles them. It notes that most whites believe that race relations in America have dramatically improved while at the same time observing that most blacks and Hispanics disagree. But, as to who is right, the commission ventures no judgment. Just as the Kerner Commission excused the riots of the mid-1960s by blaming white racism for all of the ghetto's ills, Clinton's race panel implicitly assents to views on race that are simply out of sync with reality.

Not surprisingly, the commission's only new and concrete policy idea is the creation of a permanent race commission to continue the vaunted dialogue that produced such a bumper crop of feelings. But more talk is certainly not the answer to solving what remains of America's racial problems. The remaining barriers to racial equality—like faltering public schools, poor job skills, and self-defeating cultural attitudes—are stubbornly immune to officially sponsored group therapy. •

NOTEBOOK

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: One thing President Clinton doesn't have much of these days is moral stature, which is why Tuesday's visit and endorsement from South African anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela seemed to mean so much. "We have often said that our morality does not allow us to desert our friends," Mandela told the beleaguered Clinton during a public appearance. "And we would like to say tonight: We are thinking of you in this difficult and distressing time in your life." But, while it was a moving gesture, it was not an altogether novel one. A month ago, Mandela called Fidel Castro "one of my greatest friends." And who could forget Mandela's embrace of "brother leader" Muammar Qaddafi, whom Mandela visited a year ago over the protests of critics? "Those who object to my visiting Libya have no morals. And I will not join them because I have morals," Mandela said at the time. "Qaddafi is my friend, and he helped us at a time when we were alone." Not exactly good company for President Clinton. But, of course, these days he'll take any friends he can find. •

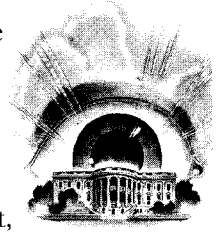
WHITE HOUSE WATCH

SID'S ID

By Dana Milbank

"I feel like a character in a novel. I feel like somebody who is surrounded by an oppressive force that is creating a lie about me, and I can't get the truth out. I feel like the character in the novel *Darkness at Noon*."
—Sidney Blumenthal, quoting Bill Clinton speaking to Blumenthal about the Lewinsky affair.

It is time to take Sid Blumenthal seriously. *Hey, wipe that smirk off your face.* He is indeed a man of substance. *Stop laughing this instant.* In fact, the future of nations rests in his hands. *If you cannot contain yourself, you will be asked to leave the room.*



Admittedly, the Clinton consigliere does not lend himself to serious analysis. At the moment, he's fighting accusations that he planted the story about poor Henry Hyde's long-ago affair. "BILL'S DIRT DEVIL," the *New York Post* called Sid last week. Blumenthal denies it, but few believe him, because he's Clinton's hatchet man. And this fracas comes on top of Blumenthal's dishonorable mention in the Starr report, in which he delivers the *Darkness at Noon* howler. Clinton

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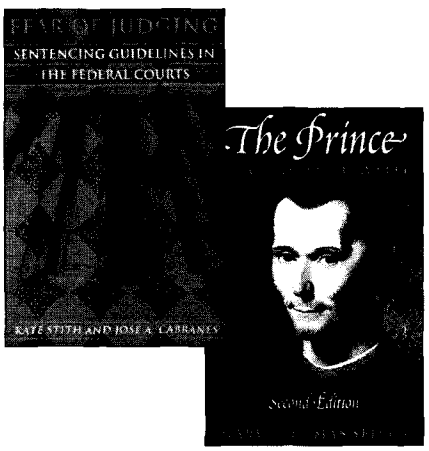

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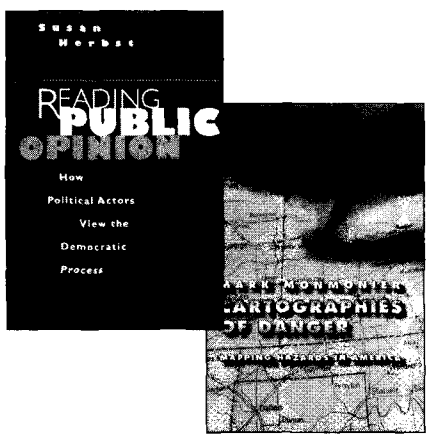

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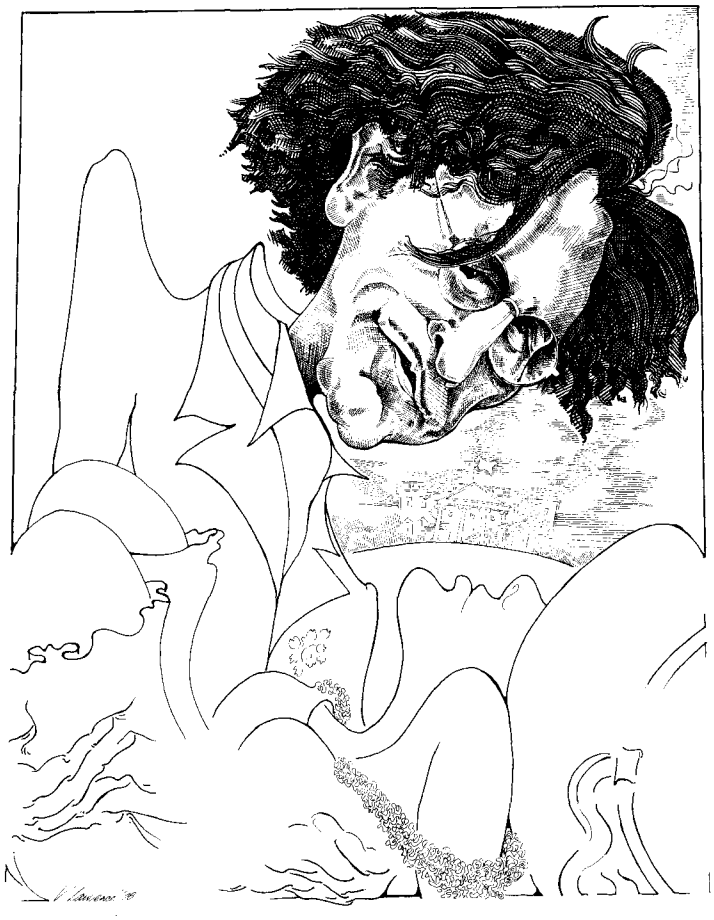
supposedly told Blumenthal a cock-and-bull story about how Lewinsky had demanded sex and Clinton "rebuffed her." (Depends on how you define "rebuffed.") Never mind that the Arthur Koestler flourish sounds more like Blumenthal than Clinton. Blindly loyal, Blumenthal apparently bought Clinton's lie—which helps to explain the ferocity with which he savaged Starr and other members of the vast right-wing conspiracy.

But enough of the Dirt Devil. This is not the Sid Blumenthal we have gathered to analyze today. Nor is it the Sid Blumenthal who tangles with Matt Drudge and displays a framed copy of his Starr subpoena in his windowless office in the West Wing basement. It is not the Sid Blumenthal who is reviled by his former journalistic colleagues. It is not even the Sid Blumenthal dubbed "grassy knoll" by White House colleague Rahm Emanuel because of his wacky conspiracy theories.

No, the Sid Blumenthal under discussion here is the policy intellectual. Blumenthal, when not wearing his bad-guy hat, is the White House point man in the development of a new way of packaging Clinton's brand of centrist government. Moderate Democrats hope it will outlast the Clinton presidency and help elect Al Gore and a moderate Democratic Congress. Blumenthal is also in charge of White House efforts to export to Europe this style of pragmatic, market-based, New Democratic thinking known by its current buzzword as the "Third Way." The goal: Establish the Third Way doctrine as a replacement for old-style social democracy and establish America as the ideological leader of a reformed left. "Sidney," says the Democratic Leadership Council's Al From, the godfather of the movement and a man previously at odds with Blumenthal, "has been the pivotal figure in focusing the White House's attention on what's the real legacy of this administration."



SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL AND HILLARY CLINTON
BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

On Monday, Blumenthal had his big day as Third Way impresario. At New York University, Clinton met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, and other luminaries to discuss the Third Way. It was (or would have been, if everybody hadn't been watching Clinton's grand jury testimony) the culmination of a year of Blumenthal efforts, at home and abroad, to give coherence to Clinton's disparate politics. Blumenthal himself says his Third Way work "is the most important thing" he does. "The Starr and Drudge stuff comes and goes," he told me. "This is the really substantive work." The Third Way movement "is a larger project than this administration." Given the current outlook for this administration, that's no boast.

The schizophrenic nature of Blumenthal's duties is fitting at this low moment for the Clinton White House. Clinton's centrist policies, which Blumenthal wants to make permanent, are the best hope for the left's future. But Clinton's personal disgrace threatens to destroy his bid to institutionalize them. And Blumenthal, whose antagonism fueled the hostility in Starr and congressional Republicans that now puts Clinton's presidency in jeopardy, is inevitably tied to Clinton's downfall. By accident, Blumenthal has come to embody both the promise and the tragedy of his hero, Clinton.

The problem right now is that the bad Clinton and the bad Sid are getting the best of the good Clinton and the good Sid. The result could be trouble for those who favor the Third Way. Even before Bimbroglio, Clinton's critics on the left saw his New Democratic philosophy as unprincipled and opportunistic. Will they now see it as immoral?

In truth, Democrats in Congress will have only themselves to blame for the losses, at least if polls are to be believed. "Bill Clinton's problem is not a party problem, it is not a New Democratic problem, it's a Clinton problem," says Elaine Kamarck, a New Democrat and Gore adviser who teaches at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

But other ills, unrelated to Clinton's moral lapse, also threaten the free-market Democrats. The economic meltdowns in Russia and Asia have undermined the entire DLC notion of a global free market and an economic policy that operates separately from politics. In Russia, market reforms have flopped, and, in Asia, the sort of international organizations the DLC favors have proved powerless. And, if troubles abroad cause the U.S. economy to stumble, Clinton's ideas could be

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blamed. "It's hard to make the Third Way argument in a recession," former Clinton adviser Bill Galston says.

Blumenthal is an unlikely figure to be shaping Third Way politics. At Brandeis in the 1960s, he was part of Students for a Democratic Society. As a journalist, he opposed Al From's DLC and its centrist policies. Writing for TNR in 1992, he mentioned how Clinton resolved "the problem of the Democratic Leadership Council in his candidacy" essentially by rejecting a DLC strategy of a "Southern-based campaign of exclusionary strife that would be openly critical of liberalism." He quoted a Clinton adviser as saying, "I don't think the DLC has much meaning."

More than an ideological lefty, however, Blumenthal is a loyalist. He operates like a Chicago precinct captain. In 1984, he worshiped Gary Hart, who had the "potential of making liberalism once again the country's dominant doctrine." When Clinton emerged as a contender, Blumenthal rushed to back him and, especially, his wife. He wrote paeans to Clinton in TNR and, later, in *The New Yorker*, infuriating colleagues by using his journalist status to do what amounted to opposition research for Clinton. Finally, his close ties to the first lady got him into the White House last year.

Hillary Clinton, herself from the Democratic left but searching for a legacy for her husband, had a say in giving the Third Way cause to Blumenthal. Blumenthal and the first lady traveled to Britain to discuss the international Third Way collaboration with Blair. He arranged a "thinkers' dinner" on the subject for the president and various academics. And, this summer, he assembled a meeting, chaired by the first lady, at the White House between New Democrats and labor Democrats to reach a truce and search for unifying themes.

These days, Sid, though a youthful 49, is graying at the temples, and he favors French cuffs and pinstripes. "I've changed because I've learned a lot," he said. "The situation has changed. We've now reached a point where the Democrats can be called the party of fiscal discipline."

The DLC, he told me, has shed its factionalism. And liberals have come to realize that the market needn't be the enemy. "It's a question of understanding new realities and seeing where the positive instrument of government might be used in this new framework," Blumenthal said. "The old solutions weren't wrong in an absolute sense. They'd just become creaky and outmoded." But the shift in Blumenthal's thinking, it seems to me, is more about his loyalty to the man than the idea. "Call it Clintonism," he said. "Clintonism has become the consensus position. Clintonism defines the Democratic Party." He told me this before Clinton's testimony and confession, when Democrats came to worry that Clintonism would define the party in an entirely different way.

Still, Blumenthal seemed intellectually impressive. Shortly thereafter, though, Sid was back in the dirt. The papers reported that Blumenthal had subpoenaed a number of conservative journalists as part of his lawsuit against Drudge, whose Internet rag falsely accused Blumenthal of wife-beating. The journalists were, as *The Wall Street Journal* noted, "Mr. Blumenthal's private enemies list," including *Weekly Standard* writers who love Sid-bashing. It was just the sort of heavy-handedness for which Blumenthal condemns Starr. A new round of Sid Vicious comments ensued, and Blumenthal, who loves to make such mischief, no doubt took it as an honor.

In that sense, Sid Blumenthal is much like the president he serves. One loves women too much; the other hates conservatives too much. Both feel persecuted and misunderstood. And both are capable of great things—if only they could stay out of the muck. •

Why the commentariat wants Clinton out.

PARLIAMENT ENVY

By Timothy Noah

Since the Bimbroglio scandal broke last January, Washington's politico-journalist elite has taken a dimmer view of Bill Clinton than ordinary Americans have. In Washington, pressure is mounting for Clinton to go: congressional Democrats, following the lead of Senator Joseph Lieberman, have ratcheted up their criticism, and House Republicans are preparing for impeachment. *The Washington Post* editorialized on September 17 that "an honorable man would long ago have resigned on his own," a sentiment widely shared in the capital. Yet Clinton's popularity, though falling, remains quite high. A *Newsweek* poll released September 20 put Clinton's approval rating at 58 percent—even though 66 percent agreed that the president "lied under oath."

What explains this "umbrage gap" (to borrow journalist David Corn's felicitous phrase)? Much of it can be attributed to Washington's furtive passion for parliamentary-style democracy. For weeks, Clinton's few remaining defenders in the commentariat have been warning that, if Clinton goes, the United States will have made "a massive shift toward a British-style system of parliamentary government," in the words of Yale Law School's Bruce Ackerman. "We do not have a parliamentary system of government in which prime ministers are removed when the country loses confidence in them," explained former New York Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman in *Newsday*. Similar comments have been made by *New York Times* columnist Anthony Lewis and even by his conservative *Times* colleague William Safire and former Republican Senator Howard Baker of Watergate fame.

But generations of thoughtful and not-so-thoughtful close observers of the Washington scene have repeatedly observed that shifting the U.S. government toward a more parliamentary-style system on the English model wouldn't be such a bad idea. As is often noted, the cur-

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rent rigorous separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches frequently leaves two-thirds of the government spending more time quarreling than addressing pressing issues. The balkanized nature of federal power has also combined, during the last half-century, with the rise of television and special-interest politics to weaken political parties that once helped to keep the whole unruly mess together. The parliamentary system (again, on the two-party English model—no one wants the multiparty chaos of Italy) is inviting because it knocks down the barrier between executive and legislative fiefdoms and rewards political parties whose members stick together. In sum, it's more efficient.

This critique is hardly foreign to the rest of the country, but, to ordinary Americans, it lacks urgency. These are (at least for the moment) still good economic times. People don't really care whether the federal government is humming along with maximum efficiency, because they don't feel they need much from it. Clinton's continued high approval ratings, paradoxically, reflect this disengagement; folks like Clinton not because they think he's a nice guy but because he's presiding over low unemployment and low inflation. People outside Washington are grateful not to have to think about Washington. They can view the prospect of a crippled presidency for the next two years with comparative equanimity. But people inside official Washington view the federal government as the local industry or (less cynically) the locus of their ambitions and ideals; when it functions badly, that messes up their lives. To this latter group, the prospect of a crippled presidency is torture.

Of course, it hasn't been particularly fashionable, during the last decade or so, for members of the Washington establishment to say out loud that they'd like to rewrite the Constitution. But, through much of this century, whenever such talk has become fashionable, the systemic changes offered up for consideration have nearly always been ones that would make the U.S. system more parliamentary. As a political scientist, Woodrow Wilson's main complaint with Congress was that it was too much at odds with the executive branch (and also, because of warring committee fiefdoms within Congress, too much at odds with itself). He proposed consolidation of power according to the English parliamentary model. A half-century later, the gridlock under President Jimmy Carter stimulated similar Parliament envy in Washington lawyer Lloyd Cutler; Hedrick Smith (then of *The New York Times*); historian James MacGregor Burns; Wisconsin Representative Henry Reuss; Mickey Kaus (then of *The Washington Monthly* and *Harper's* and later of THE NEW REPUBLIC); and Richard L. Strout, this magazine's TRB columnist from 1943 to 1983.

The problem of governance in the United States is real. As Reuss, now retired from Congress, observes in his forthcoming memoir, *When Government Was Good*, incoming presidents could expect to enjoy majorities in Congress as a matter of course until the 1950s. Overall, "divided government" occurred only 25 percent of the time, usually because a president lost the congressional majority in a midterm election. Since 1954, by contrast, there has been divided government 68 percent of the time. The eventual result was a federal government that, starting around the mid-'70s, didn't do much of anything new domestically. It also created a huge deficit during the 1980s because Republicans and Democrats couldn't agree on whether to cut spending or raise taxes to pay for entitlements and defense.

What could be done to lessen the chaos created by the current system of checks and balances? During the 1970s and 1980s, a variety of intriguing proposals to rewrite the Constitution along parliamentary lines were put forth. One was the "team ticket" idea, in which voters who pulled the lever for a presidential candidate would automatically be voting also for same-party candidates for the House and Senate. Another was that the president select half of his Cabinet from his party's membership in Congress and that these Cabinet members remain in Congress while serving in the Cabinet. Another was to eliminate midterm elections altogether and let House members serve four years and senators eight. Another was to let the president name congressional leaders and committee chairmen. Most of these ideas were considered by the nonprofit Committee on the Constitutional System, created for the Constitution's 1987 bicentennial and headed by Cutler, then-Senator Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas, and former Treasury Secretary C. Douglas Dillon. In the end, these Washington insiders didn't endorse any of these proposals—partly for practical reasons (how do you sell House members on the idea that they should tie their fate directly to that of presidential candidates?) and partly, one assumes, because the members understood such notions to be unacceptable outside the Beltway. The boldest attempt to make government more "parliamentary" *without* changing the Constitution—the legislative veto, which allowed the House or Senate to void government regulations—was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1983.

But, if the Constitution can't be rewritten and new laws can't be passed to make our system a more parliamentarian one, perhaps customs can be changed. Maybe it can become reasonable to expect that a president who becomes ineffective and an embarrassment to his party, as Clinton has, will just leave, as he would in a parliamentary government. Or, maybe, if you don't happen to think perjury and obstruction of justice in a civil suit constitute "high crimes and misdemeanors," traditional doctrine about what that phrase denotes can be broadened somewhat to make an impeachment vote more like the parliamentary vote of no confidence. (Granted, in the latter instance, it would be necessary to make the whole process move much more swiftly.) The desire to rid the country of a sadly—perhaps unfairly—humiliated leader is a practical urge at one with the desire to make government more efficient generally. Under different circumstances, maybe even Bill Clinton might agree.

TIMOTHY NOAH is a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly*.

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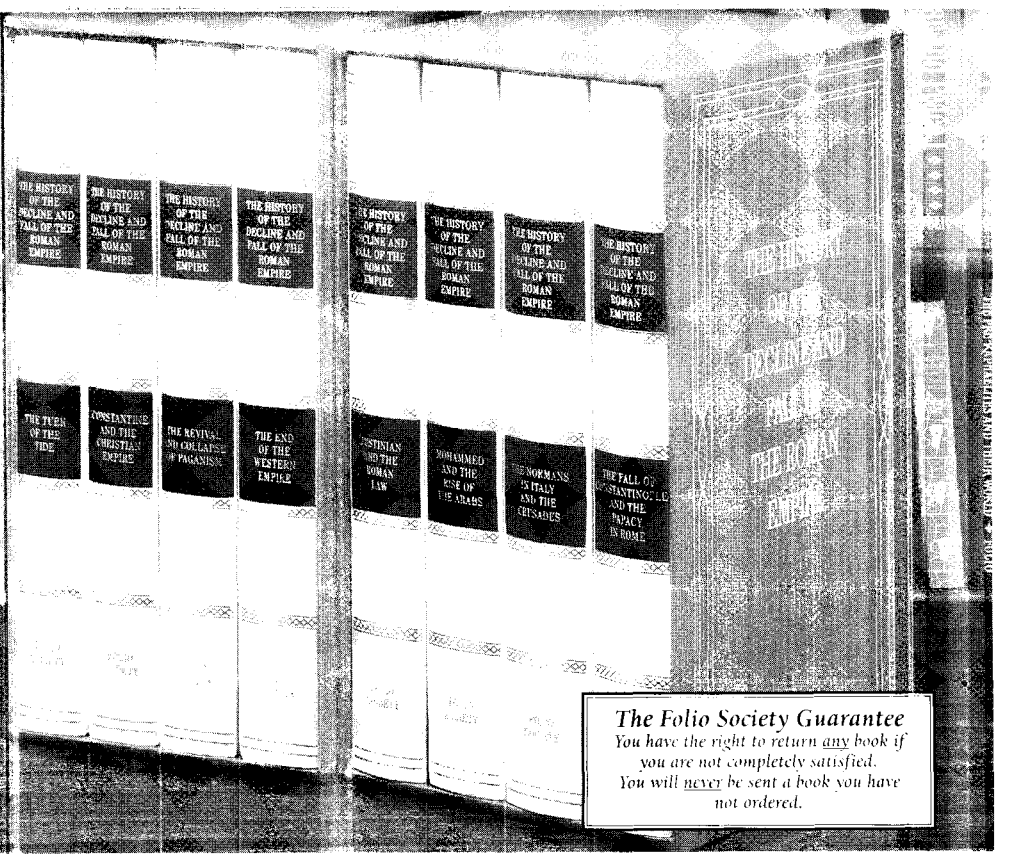

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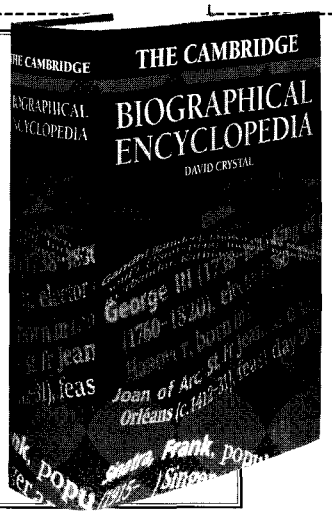

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Time for a true economic miracle.

JAPANESE JAM

By John B. Judis

Most of Asia is still in the throes of a severe recession, with unemployment hovering at 20 percent in Indonesia and gross domestic product falling seven percent this year in South Korea and Thailand. The crisis now appears to be spreading eastward toward Europe through Russia and across the Pacific to the United States and Latin America. It could be halted, but not without dramatic changes in Japan's governing economic philosophy. And these won't be easily forthcoming, as the Clinton administration once again learned last week.

Japan, the world's second-largest economy, holds the key to Asia's economic crisis and recovery. From 1989 to 1997, when the region's banks began tottering, Japan was the largest source of loans to Asia's newly industrializing countries (NICs) and, along with the United States, their most important export market. According to Ed Lincoln of the Brookings Institution, Japanese lending to Asian countries totaled about $125 billion by 1997. But Asia's trade deficit with Japan has grown, and, in late 1997, the Japanese began both cutting back and calling in loans to the region. As a result, Japan is now undermining economies that it once helped sustain.

The seminal event in the Asian crisis was Japan's 1995 decision, made with vigorous American support, to drive down the value of the yen against the dollar. (See my "Dollar Foolish," TNR, December 9, 1996.) The drop in the yen's value put Japanese goods at an advantage over the goods of other Asian countries whose currencies were pegged to the dollar. From 1995 to 1996, South Korea's trade deficit with Japan increased by twelve percent, while semiconductor and other critical Korean industries found themselves undersold by Japan in third markets.

By last year, Japan itself had fallen into a recession—the result of a misguided tax increase and of declining demand in faltering Asian markets for Japanese products as recession set in. The International Monetary Fund projects a 1.8 percent decline in GDP for this year and a further downturn the next. This August, Japan's overall exports rose only 1.7 percent from the year before, while its imports declined by 3.2 percent.

And now the United States is beginning to feel the pinch. As the United States has become the market of last resort for both Japan and the Asian NICs, the American trade deficit with the Pacific Rim countries has soared: between July 1997 and July 1998, it rose 42 percent. Foreign steel producers, most of which are based in Japan, are expected to capture 27 percent of the U.S. market this year, which has already put one major American steel company in jeopardy. The entire California market is under siege. According to a study by the Milken Institute, exports from California, concentrated in high technology, dropped 18 percent to Japan and 38.7 percent to South Korea between the second quarter of 1997 and 1998—the first such decline since the recession of the early '90s. This month, the Economic Strategy Institute asked Wharton Economic Forecasting Associates (WEFA) to run a computer simulation of what would happen to the U.S. economy if the Japanese economy continued to falter. WEFA predicted a recession next year.

If the Asian imbroglio does spread, it could lead to a world recession as severe as that of the early '80s—the last time when world trade actually declined. It could spark currency crises in Brazil and other developing countries that could imperil banks in the United States and in Europe. It could also inspire governments to adopt the kind of monetary autarky and trade protection that prolonged and deepened the Great Depression of the 1930s.

It's true the United States and Europe might temporarily forestall a global crisis by jointly lowering interest rates, as many commentators now propose, thus creating demand for products from Asia and taking the pressure off embattled currencies. But the most important ingredient of an Asian recovery is a recovery in Japan that would stimulate new demand there for Asian products and new investment in Asia. Japan, in economic parlance, would become the "locomotive" that would pull Asia out of its ditch.

But plenty of obstacles loom on the tracks. For one thing, some of the conventional antidotes for recession won't work. Japan can't lower interest rates, which are already near zero, because it is in the midst of a "liquidity trap": with its industries already suffering from excess capacity, lower interest rates cannot induce new investment. Lincoln and Fred Bergsten of the Institute for International Economics have both argued for a large fiscal stimulus that would boost consumer demand and spur new investment. A tax cut in 1995 sparked a recovery the next year that the tax increase in 1997 helped to kill. But the stimulus would have to be extremely large and would have to be accompanied by reforms that would encourage domestic consumption.

And that last point is the rub. Since the end of World War II, Japan's economy has been rigged to encourage saving rather than consumption. Tax laws reward bank deposits and punish spending; cartels have kept domestic prices unnaturally high. Banks and the Ministry of Finance have used the resulting savings to fund industrial investments but not primarily for the home market. As Richard Katz, the author of *Japan: The System That Soured*, has shown, the gap between what Japan's consumers spend and what its economy produces has risen from an average of four to five percent of GDP during the 1980s to almost seven percent today. These surplus

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products have gone overseas and have become the basis for Japan's burgeoning trade surplus. This mercantilist strategy famously produced an economic "miracle" in the '70s and '80s, but today it is the source of profound instability in Asia and recurring trade conflict with the United States and Western Europe.

Encouraging consumption would be tantamount to abandoning this mercantilist strategy. An emphasis on consumer-driven investment could also undercut the role of the banks and the Ministry of Finance in allocating investment, while possibly unleashing uncontrollable political forces, including an independent labor movement and a democratic opposition. Writes Akio Mikuni, the president of Japan's only independent bond-rating agency: "Japan's policy elite is unlikely of its own accord to promote measures that could replace the mercantilist thrust of Japan's political economy with a system aimed at maximizing living standards for the broad mass of Japanese. The current system will have to break down to the point where economic conditions for ordinary people become sufficiently desperate that they demand real reform."

Alas, President Clinton's expression of sympathy and confusion, which he offered to Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi this week, will only embolden the opponents of economic reform. Says Richard Katz: "Clinton's statements made it more likely, rather than less, that financial turmoil in Japan and its neighbors will continue and perhaps accelerate." And, while dire warnings from Secretary of the Treasury Robert Rubin and Deputy Treasury Secretary Larry Summers have certainly had an impact in the past, American jawboning can only accomplish so much. In the end, Japan is going to have to act on its own behalf. Let's hope that happens before American workers once again start taking sledgehammers to Panasonics and Toyotas. •

LAGOS DISPATCH

MILES TO GO

By Roger Cohen

The nights are still wild and the whiff of marijuana strong at the Shrine, the Lagos club made famous by the late great Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. A year ago, Fela, the king of Afrobeat, died from AIDS, so now it is his son, Femi, who pumps up the Nigerian crowds with his magic sax—all while a host of go-go girls, including his wife, indulge in forms of gyration that make the sexual act itself look tame. Seething Lagos, ground down by dust and delinquency and decay, is suddenly alight here, defying its own ruin with an energy that seems to find its source in misery itself. The obverse of hell is knowing how to party. "That is why I love Nigeria," says a young man, clambering onto a table for a better view. "It's thrilling."

Gasoline may be in short supply in Africa's most populous state; thrills, most emphatically, are not. Nigeria, plundered and misused, heaves and lurches like the giant it is, offering a daily defiance of gravity that is breathtaking. "BE CAREFUL, GOD IS WATCHING," reads a popular bumper sticker, but no more than watching, to judge by the desperate state of things. Beyond the heaving streets, full of kids and cripples hawking everything from peanuts to garden shears, in the relative calm of the Victoria Island sector of Lagos, the military officers with whom America has worked to ensure its access to Nigeria's oil are safely ensconced within their gaudy mansions. These are big places, dwarfed by bigger satellite dishes, their high walls topped with banks of barbed wire and adorned with signs like: "BEWARE OF DOGS, MAN EATERS." Power, held by the armed forces for 28 of the past 32 years, has never been a subtle thing in Nigeria. There is, to put it bluntly, too much oil money at stake and too much risk of national fragmentation for niceties.

Fela, of course, was aware of the army's brutal methods and loved to hurl abuse at successive military governments. He was frequently thrown in prison for his pains; his mother was thrown elsewhere—out of a window. (She died soon afterward.) Now, Femi has taken on the mantle of his father and his grandmother. Between sax riffs, he offers this to an ecstatic crowd: "The army now says it will hand over power next year in May. I think they forgot two letters: the handover date is May-be!"

Maybe is about right. Nigeria's generals—even the painfully earnest General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who took over from General Sani Abacha upon the latter's sudden death in June—have lost any claim to the benefit of the doubt. They have made a twisted art of the extended political transition, declining to dispense entirely with a chimerical democracy, ever dangled, never delivered. The latest date is May 29, 1999. But, of eight vows to return to the barracks since the first military coup in 1966, only one has been honored, and that was back in 1979. Still, the promises keep coming, plentiful as Nigeria's coveted "Bonny Light" crude, reflecting the fact that even the army knows that Nigeria's 105 million citizens are much too smart, educated, vibrant, and caustic to accept life in a land where even a distant glimmer of a democratic future has been snuffed out.

Never, it seems, has the clamoring for democracy been as overwhelming as it is today. In almost five years of fiercely repressive rule—years that saw state-sponsored murder reach the level of a national pastime and gave rise to a Nigerian gulag—General Abacha managed to convince just about everyone here that the army must go. It appears possible that dissident members of the armed forces, appalled, if belatedly, by the cruelty and kleptomania of his regime, murdered

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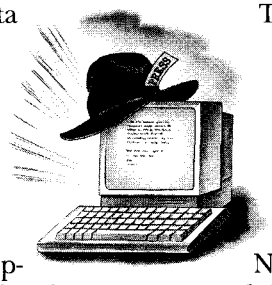
him. It is certain that he is now remembered by Nigerians with the affectionate sobriquet of "the leper."

Abacha's other nicknames—"Mister Fifty Percent," "Mister Pocket Calculator," and "The Goalkeeper"—refer to his obsession with taking a cut on every contract, whether for exported oil or for the gasoline Nigeria had to import once its four refineries had been allowed to fall into ruin. Western officials believe Abacha may have stolen over $3.5 billion, a figure that puts Abacha in the league of Mobutu Sese Seko, who amassed similar sums over three decades in Zaire. Abacha's former national security adviser, Ismaila Gwarzo, has been arrested in connection with the disappearance of a mere $2.45 billion from the notoriously porous Nigerian Central Bank. Meanwhile, schools are decaying; Nigeria's once-formidable universities are collapsing. Many factories are idled, and fuel, whether for cars or planes, often is impossible to find.

It is the very scale of this Abacha-induced economic disaster, combined with the sudden death of the opposition leader Moshood K.O. Abiola, who was in detention, that appears to make Nigeria's latest stab at a democratic transition so treacherous. The need for change is not in doubt. Military rule has gone out of fashion in Africa and elsewhere. Nigeria's per capita income has plunged to a quarter of its level a decade ago. Much of the rest of the continent is looking to what has been called the "epicenter of black humanity" for an example of something other than gross misrule. Bill Clinton's vaunted African renaissance will never amount to much if Nigeria continues to flounder. But habits of corruption, seeping from the summit of power, are now deeply, perhaps irrevocably, ingrained. And the death of Abiola as he was about to be released has exacerbated the ethnic tensions that have led to war in the past and that now, once again, threaten Nigeria's continued existence as a nation.



Abiola was a Yoruba, from the southwestern part of Nigeria. Yet he apparently won the 1993 election as a detribalized Nigerian, gaining strong support in the mainly Hausa and Fulani North and indeed throughout the country. Money, a great deal of it, plus a crude populism helped him to the victory the army then denied, but that is scarcely the point (even though Western diplomats love to belabor it). The issue is another. In a country long dominated by Northern generals, a man of the South was denied a victory he fairly won. As a result, anger in the Yoruba Southwest is running high. "The consequences of a Northern victory in the election next year are hard to contemplate," said Bola Ige, a lawyer and perhaps the most influential Yoruba politician. "If the Americans now make the mistake of supporting a Northerner to become president, they will suffer; we will all suffer. There is an infrastructure for armed struggle in this country."

Nowhere more so than in the mainly Ibo Southeast, where the bulk of America's investments in Nigeria are concentrated. These investments rose by about $3 billion to $7 billion under Abacha, a reflection of the critical importance of Nigerian oil to the United States and the Clinton administration's unerring readiness to look the other way when nasty politics threaten important business interests.

Three years after the execution of the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa, resentment is running very high in the Niger Delta region of the Southeast, and not merely among the devastated minority Ogoni ethnic group that Saro-Wiwa represented. The anger is rooted in a poverty extraordinary for an area so rich in oil. This misery has been fed by the negligence of the Nigerian government and by the belated realization by Western oil companies that paying taxes and royalties was not enough if that money was going straight to the Swiss bank accounts of the generals. Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Texaco, and others are now trying to do more for the seven million inhabitants of the Delta, but their efforts have not yet eased tensions that appear to be at breaking point. Sabotage and hostage-taking are now frequent; armed attacks bolder and less rare.

Still, the Ibos have tried once to secede, with the declaration of the state of Biafra in 1967; and, after the loss of one million lives, they are not about to try again. The Ibos still feel betrayed by the Yorubas, who did not help them during the Biafran war, and they argue that, if the Yorubas want to go for secession after being denied the Abiola victory, they will have to go it alone, at least initially.

It is this tension between the two principal ethnic groups of the South that the Northern Hausas have long been able to exploit. It is also a tension that may favor the survival of Nigeria because, if Hausas, Yorubas, and Ibos cannot agree on anything, they may be forced to opt for the status quo—that is, the strange multiethnic state thrown together on a whim by Britain's Frederick Lugard in 1914. The sheer multitude of minority ethnic groups—some of them numbering in the millions—also appears to militate for Nigeria's survival, for it would be virtually impossible to carve out territory for each of them.

What seems certain is that a breakup has the potential to make Yugoslavia and Zaire appear like child's play. Nigeria matters deeply to the United States—it is the fifth-largest supplier of imported oil—and the Clinton administration is determined to avoid a disastrous dissolution. But it is this very obsession with Nigerian stability that led America to tolerate repeated military governments, including Abacha's, which faced sanctions so mild as to be virtually meaningless. Those despotic regimes, in turn, led Nigeria to its current state of collapse, an economic implosion that has inevitably stirred ethnic friction. The creation of truly national parties now appears an arduous task, and it will not be easy to find a democratic leader with the kind of nationwide appeal that Abiola enjoyed.

"I am very angry with America," said Femi, the musician, who has a huge following and said he had been

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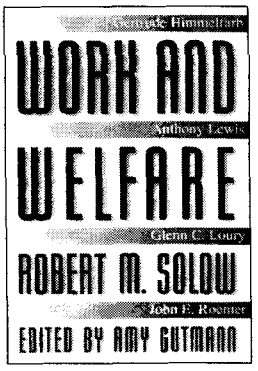

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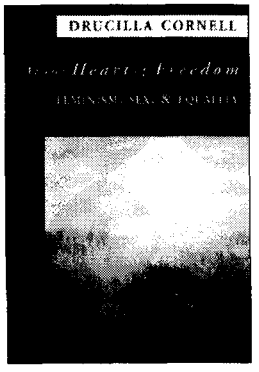

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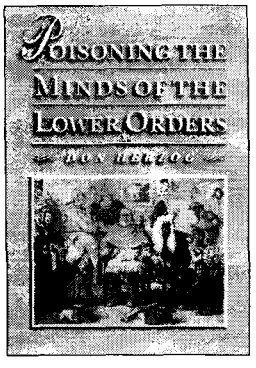

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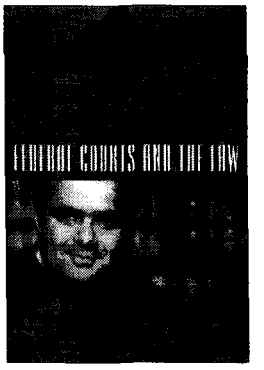

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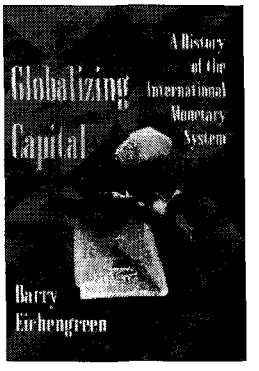

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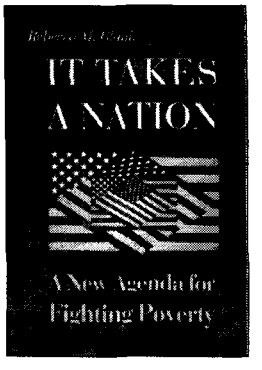

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asked to run for president. "In the end, if the military is in power, it's because America has wanted it." He was echoing a widespread anti-American sentiment, fueled by the fact that Abiola died in the presence of an American delegation. Outside the club, a huge crowd milled. One stoned man muttered about his need for psychiatric help. Another said simply, "If you can live in this country, you can live anywhere." That is true. So, too, is the notion that, if Nigeria can survive, so can any country on earth.

ROGER COHEN, Berlin bureau chief of *The New York Times*, is the author of *Hearts Grown Brutal: Sagas of Sarajevo* (Random House).

Scapegoating Russia's oligarchs.

NOT-SO-BADFELLAS

By Chrystia Freeland

While doctors in Vladivostok go on strike because they have not been paid for a year, in a lavish dacha outside Moscow, one of Russia's six oligarchs stages a weekly striptease show performed by young Russian beauties. The girls dance on a little island in a vast swimming pool, where ogling bathers often include Cabinet members. The performance is just one example of a lifestyle that has made Russia's leading businessmen living caricatures of capitalist excess. They have holiday homes in the Mediterranean and healthy balances in the discreet banks of Switzerland; they dress their mistresses in couture and diamonds. Less than a decade after they began building their empires, several of them have already made the *Forbes* list of the world's richest men.

In a country where male life expectancy has plunged nearly to the levels of sub-Saharan Africa, such ostentation is not particularly tasteful. Yet what is truly outrageous about the oligarchs is not their wealth but their political power, which has become increasingly visible over the past few weeks. As Russia plunged into an economic crisis and its government collapsed, the oligarchs formed what was effectively the nation's kitchen cabinet. On August 16, the fateful evening when the government decided to allow the ruble to devalue, the oligarchs spent the night pacing outside the prime minister's office. When Domingo Cavallo, the architect of Argentina's recovery from hyperinflation, was called in this month to offer urgent advice to President Boris Yeltsin's Cabinet, it was the oligarchs who arranged his invitation.

Needless to say, as they cruise Moscow in sleek cars bearing official government plates—the Kremlin's nod to their quasi-ministerial status—the oligarchs are not wielding power on behalf of the collective good. Ever since they persuaded the state to hand them Russia's choicest companies for a fraction of their value in 1995, the oligarchs have been perfecting the art of using their influence for personal gain. Boris Nemtsov, the reformist deputy prime minister who lost his job in last month's Cabinet shuffle, even claims the oligarchs orchestrated the dismissal of Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko's government because its reform proposals would have threatened their business empires.

It is crony capitalism in its most naked form. And it has prompted observers both in Russia and in the West to cast the oligarchs as the villains in Russia's flawed capitalist transformation. It seems hard to disagree. After all, the oligarchs do buy government officials, hide their profits offshore, and have preferred manipulating the privatization process to making investments in the real economy.

But, while these practices may not be quite what they teach at Harvard Business School, in a country of corrupt bureaucrats, weak legal guarantees for investment, and taxes that are both impossibly high and haphazardly imposed, the oligarchs' tactics actually constitute the only rational business strategy. In short, for all their myriad sins, the oligarchs are merely a symptom of Russia's disease, not the disease itself.

So, if the oligarchs are not at the evil root of Russia's ailing capitalism, what is? The country's first and most fundamental problem is the weakness of the state. The Communist Party once provided the sinews of that state. Yeltsin snapped them, but he never built a new government machine to replace them. As a result, his government cannot perform even such basic functions as the fair enforcement of contracts or tax collection—a weakness the financial collapse has exacerbated. It can barely control its army; in Chechnya, demoralized and hungry Russian soldiers sold their guns to their Chechen adversaries, asking only that the weapons be turned not on them but on neighboring divisions. It has so little real authority over civil servants that recently even the State Statistics Committee was found to harbor a corrupt ring of apparatchiks selling their services for cash. It is even incompetent in the one field that should be its specialty: politics. The oligarchs owe much of their current power to their role in the 1996 elections, when they took over Yeltsin's fading presidential campaign, staffing it with their own people.

With no one in charge, the oligarchs can manipulate ministers, gobble up state assets, and serve as a shadow Cabinet. Somehow, when post-Communist Russia imbibed the free market gospel, it forgot one very important thing: it takes more than capitalists to build capitalism. It also takes a strong and independent state.

But constructing state institutions is a slow, painstaking process. It requires patient builders—but the brave and committed men who spearheaded Russia's capitalist transformation were revolutionaries. You cannot

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build capitalism with Bolshevik methods, and that is what Russia's leaders have tried to do.

From the outset, Russia's reform drive has been a top-down revolution focused on shattering old structures and imposing a radical new way of life from above. It has been proud to live by the slogan that the end justifies the means, and this Machiavellian approach paved the way for the oligarchs.

The most egregious example is the shares-for-loans privatization. Under this scheme, in 1995, the government handed control of some of Russia's choicest companies to the oligarchs at knockdown prices, transforming them from middling-size entrepreneurs into bona fide international tycoons. Many criticized the process as corrupt and unfair, but Russia's market reformers dismissed those complaints as soft-minded romanticism. The imperative was to transfer property from Communist-leaning Red directors to the new breed of capitalists who sympathized with the government—quibbles about the integrity of the process were the objections of milquetoast politicians, who thought you could make an omelet without breaking eggs.

A similarly unblushing pragmatism drove the 1996 election pact between the oligarchs and the Kremlin. A few die-hard Russian democrats—mostly the dreamers who had been so unpragmatic as to end up in Soviet jails—criticized the deal. To them, it was an effective return to censorship since both the state-owned and private television networks joined the Yeltsin reelection team. Others worried that embracing the oligarchs as political partners could permanently tilt the economic tables in their favor. These objections, too, were dismissed as faint-hearted and inappropriate.

And then the predictions came true. Shares-for-loans gave the oligarchs their economic muscle. The 1996 elections gave them their political influence. Eventually, they used both to displace the very reformers who had created them. "I am firmly convinced that we reformers created the oligarchs," says Aleksei Uliukaev, a leading reform economist. "We were Frankenstein, and they are our monsters. It was our single biggest mistake."

Another related cause of Russia's current woes is the Kremlin's failure to pay more attention to liberalization and to stimulating economic change at the grassroots level. The shrunken Russian Federation employs more bureaucrats than the Soviet Union did. And, although they are ineffective at the functions a government is meant to perform, they form a formidable barrier to small-business development. Thwarted by a thicket of red tape, forced to bribe an army of apparatchiks, Russia's fledgling small-business sector could never flourish as Poland's did. (There, reformers put radical liberalization at the top of their agenda.)

An ineffectual state, a Bolshevik approach to reform, a missing middle class—these are the building blocks of Russia's kleptocracy. As the economic crisis deepens, is there any way to build a capitalist democracy on these foundations?

The Soviet apparatchiks who have been roused from hibernation to form Russia's new government are unlikely to try. Instead, as Yuri Maslyukov, the former Soviet planning boss who heads the new Cabinet's economic team, said this month, Russia will now try to spend itself out of crisis, printing rubles to pay off wage and pension arrears. That is certain to trigger a blizzard of hyperinflation, whose winter ravages will make the current turmoil seem like a summer shower.

It is impossible to predict how this will reshape Russia. It may, as hyperinflation often does, give rise to an authoritarian regime, which will seek to compensate for the economic chaos with tougher political controls. But economic instability could also create a second opportunity for reform. After a few weeks, or months, or years, Russia, like much of Latin America and Bulgaria, may tire of hyperinflation and watered-down Soviet economics and give a new group of politicians a chance to salvage Russia's market experiment.

If so, this second generation of liberal reformers must build from the bottom up. They must create real political parties to back their programs rather than relying on the uncertain support of a frail president. They must also launch the grassroots liberalization drive, which, a few years down the road, will create a solid middle-class constituency for reform.

Second, would-be reformers must admit that they preside over a pseudo-state (although that could, horribly, change if the current crisis brings an authoritarian ruler to power). A successful reform effort will begin the painstaking process of rebuilding the state, yet it must also acknowledge that, for the time being, complicated programs are beyond the government's reach.

And what about the oligarchs? The mounting crisis, which has eroded their financial empires and has brought in ministers who speak openly of nationalization, could sweep them away. But the new left-leaning government could also be the oligarchs' salvation. Most of the oligarchs founded their fortunes on the flood of cheap central-bank credits issued by Victor Gerashchenko in 1992–94 when he was chairman of the central bank. Gerashchenko has now returned to his old job and is expected to resume his old spendthrift ways. If the apparatchiks save the oligarchs, the leaders of a renewed Russian reform effort would have to live with coexistence.

And that might be okay, at least for now. Thanks to the crooked path Russia has walked toward capitalism, the empires of the oligarchs are among the few effective institutions in the country, and they are staffed by the cream of the country's professional classes. It may be emotionally satisfying to rail against them, but Russia's brightest future could be one in which the oligarchs are tamed rather than destroyed. Real social justice will have to wait until Russia has a civil society strong enough to demand it.

CHRYSTIA FREELAND has just completed four years as Moscow bureau chief for *The Financial Times* and is writing a book about the birth of Russian capitalism.

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A war correspondent returns.

BACK TO BOSNIA

By Peter Maass

A flashback: I heard the sniper's shot before I saw Haris Bahtanovic fall to the ground. He was walking through a park-turned-shooting-gallery behind Sarajevo's Holiday Inn. A few men rushed into the open and dragged Bahtanovic into a car that tore away. I wrote a story about this, about the odd way you can cover a war by sitting in your hotel room, out of the line of fire, and watch someone get shot. The next day, I found Bahtanovic in a hospital. The bullet had smashed through his left arm and grazed his ribs. I wrote another story and described the hospital's recovery ward: "It's an ugly place. One man lost both legs, another lost his foot, another has metal rods holding together what remains of his lower leg...."

With that, the parallel tracks that my life and Bahtanovic's ran along for 24 hours forked into different directions. This is what happens in a war: You are thrown from one place to another, from one state of mind to another, as though a tornado has lifted you off the ground and carried you away. The distance need not be great; from one town to another, one house to another, one room to another, one hospital bed to another, and in each there is a different world of agony or loss or hatred, a different story. You move in this way until you become sick of it and leave or become addicted to it and cannot leave or until the war breathes its last. Years go by, and you may wonder what happened to the people whose lives you dropped into, but you hesitate to make inquiries. It is like entering a deserted house; you waver because you might find unpleasant things inside.

My last trip to Bosnia had occurred in the middle of 1993, and by then I had seen enough slaughter. Over the next five years, I never returned, never tracked down the people I had written about—the Serb teacher running an ethnic-cleansing office, the warlord swearing that Muslims were not forced to leave his fiefdom, the Muslim doctor who had no anesthesia to soothe the pain of his scalpel as he operated in Srebrenica. I didn't lose interest in these people, or the many others I came to know and write about, but the moment had passed when our lives ran parallel; I thought there was little more to say about them that anyone wanted to hear, little more to be learned from them.

Then, last July, I found myself somewhat obliged to visit Bosnia, so I tracked down these ghosts. As always, Bosnia had an ace up her sleeve. I became attuned to the notion, hard to grasp back when the bombs were still falling and men were being shot under my window, that, while people can be murdered rather easily and towns can be flattened with the right artillery pieces and cities can be conquered in due course, countries are rather hard to kill. The apparent victory in elections this month of hardline nationalist Nikola Poplasen, who defeated President Biljana Plavsic, a moderate by the unique standards of politics in Republika Srpska, is a major setback for the U.S.-backed process of reconciliation, but it need not be a death knell. The task of bringing Bosnia back to life will now be longer and harder, but the forces that wish to destroy Bosnia are not as omnipotent as they would like us to believe (this was also the case during the war); and it is useful to keep in mind that there is a historical pattern, in the Balkans as elsewhere, of war-torn nations collapsing, dead or nearly dead, and rising again, perhaps weaker than before, but resurrected nonetheless.

There should be no misunderstanding: Bosnia's troubles are as striking as the mortar imprints on Marshall Tito Street in Sarajevo. With few exceptions, refugees who want to return to territory controlled by a different group—Muslims wishing to return to Banja Luka or west Mostar, Serbs wishing to return to Sarajevo, or Croats wishing to return to Brcko—are unable to do so despite pledges all sides made in the 1995 Dayton Peace Accord. Just a few war criminals have been arrested by SFOR, the U.S.-led international peacekeeping force. Bosnia's economy, such as it is, depends on foreign aid. Government corruption is endemic. Mistrust prevails.

But the news could be worse. The news could be that nobody wants to reknit ties severed during the war, that armed checkpoints remain in place, that you cannot drive or make a phone call from Sarajevo to Banja Luka, that the international community is going to leave any day now, that the people of Bosnia are aching to fight another war, that the politicians who led them into battle are immortal and will remain in power forever. These are the disaster scenarios, and they are not unfolding.

Take a look, for example, at Visegrad. Throughout

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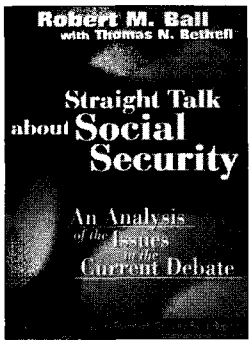

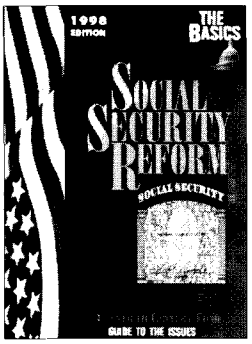

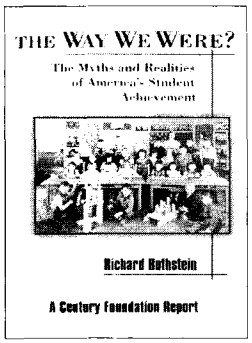
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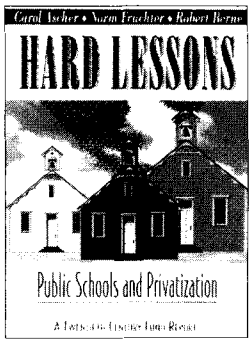

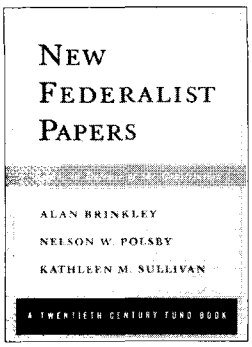

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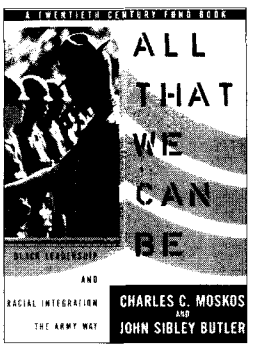

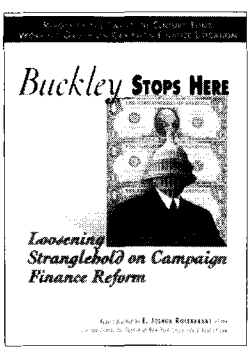

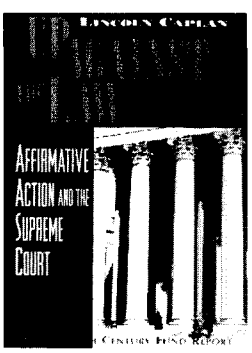

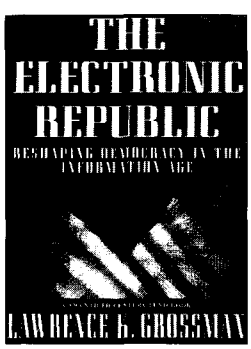

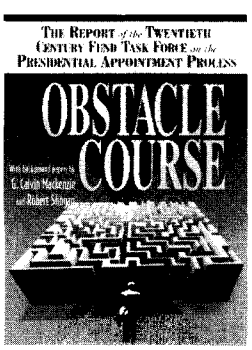

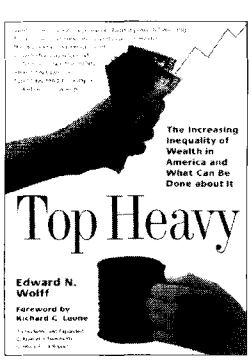
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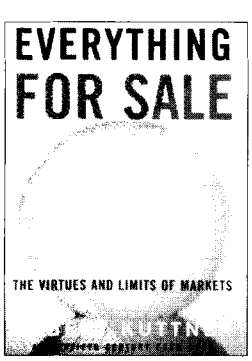

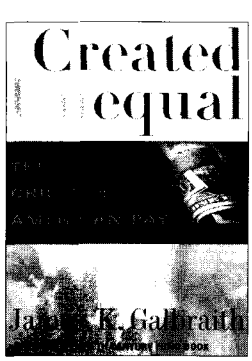

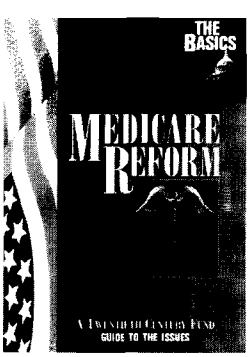

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the ages, this town has been a nerve center of conflict because it is near the border with Serbia and the majority of its inhabitants were Muslim. As soon as war broke out in 1992, the Muslims were "cleansed" from Visegrad, some of them taken to a lovely sixteenth-century bridge over the Drina River, where their throats were cut and their bodies thrown into the cold, green water. I visited Visegrad in the summer of 1992 and walked through its deserted streets and its looted homes. I met Momcilo Mirkovic, who called himself "executive mayor" and wore a pistol at his waist. There had been no cleansing, he insisted, no killings; the Muslims left voluntarily.

I returned to Visegrad in July. Mirkovic was easy to locate; an operator provided his home number. He reluctantly agreed to meet at a café patronized by beefy men with flashy rings, expensive watches, and sauntering demeanors that indicated it had been some time since they were engaged in honest work. I tried to act like an old friend, but Mirkovic was jittery, on guard. He is no longer executive mayor; now he is a businessman, though he didn't want to say what line of business. His eyes shifted from one place to another, like those of a fugitive. His hair had gone gray since I saw him five years before, and he was thinner. He put a pack of Marlboros on the table and smoked one, then another and another, and, when he raised his lighter to his cigarette, his hand shook. He asked how my drive from Belgrade had been, and, when I answered that I had come from Sarajevo, unfriendly territory, his comfort level nosedived.

"I don't want to talk about politics," he said. "Only refugees." I asked a few softball questions about refugees and returned to politics. "I don't like politics," he stammered. "I left politics two years ago, after Dayton." He cited "health reasons," refusing to elaborate further. I asked how he became "executive mayor"—I assume he was installed after the town's Muslim leadership had been killed or driven out—but once more he refused to talk about that era. "I don't like to speak about politics.... I'm tired now. Perhaps our talk can continue tomorrow." He looked at his watch and said he had a meeting in a few minutes. I mentioned that SFOR had arrested a handful of men accused of doing "bad things" in the war, and I asked whether people were upset about this. I didn't use the touchy words "war criminals" or "war crimes," but he knew I was asking whether he was afraid of being arrested and sent to The Hague for trial. He began to rise from his chair. "I am sorry," he said. "I have a meeting at four. I must go. I must go."

Mirkovic was frightened, not defiant, and this was encouraging. His role in Visegrad's cleansing was, most likely, only on a political level, letting the death squads do the dirty work. But, if his behavior is any guide, brand-name warlords like Radovan Karadzic are not the only ones running scared in Republika Srpska; even the small fry hear a clock ticking when they go to sleep at night. It would be wrong, in the wake of Poplasen's apparent victory, to refrain from trying to arrest more alleged war criminals. More than ever, purveyors of hatred who have committed war crimes must be brought to justice, though the risk of doing so, in SFOR casualties, may now be greater than before. This is the price of our dithering.

Hoping to take the pulse of more ordinary Bosnian Serbs, I arranged for a reunion with another figure from the past, Vladimir Radjen. When our paths first crossed in 1992, Radjen was cleaning up his street, which had been ransacked during the cleansing of Visegrad. Windows were broken, doors were ajar, even floorboards were ripped up. "We all lived in Visegrad like a big family, the Muslims and Serbs," he said at the time. Five years later, he does not doubt that he and his fellow Serbs have been led down a dead end. Radjen, 42, now works in a grocery store that is so run-down it not only has no name, there is not even a sign in front indicating it is a grocery store. Across the street is a reminder of what had been and what happened during the war—a patch of ground, covered with weeds, where the town's mosque was located before it was dynamited into rubble.

We walked to a restaurant alongside the river and the bridge; a more historic and charming spot would be hard to imagine, though there was a surreal twist because the restaurant's stereo was tuned to the SFOR station. A deejay with a British accent played songs designed to appeal to the musical common denominator of fighting men and women from around the world—so Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, and the Spice Girls alternately sang in the background as Radjen unfurled his woes. We sat 50 yards from a statue of Ivo Andric, the Yugoslav writer whose majestic novel about Visegrad, *The Bridge Over the Drina*, earned him the Nobel Prize for literature.

"Andric ... said there are times when clever men are silent and stupid men talk and robbers become rich," Radjen began. "Everything he wrote has happened in this war." Who was Radjen mad at? The nationalists, he said, citing, first of all, Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic, Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, and Alija Izetbegovic, leader of Bosnia's Muslims. Then Radjen said he was mad at himself, too. I asked why. "Because I was born and must live now," he explained. "I wish I had been born later. I don't know what to do. But I have to be with my people." He pointed to a row of stores across the street. Before the war, most storekeepers were Muslim. "Now," he said, "everyone is a Serb, but I don't know who they are."

There were only two months left before the September national elections, but Radjen's apathy was so great he not only had no idea for whom he would vote, he didn't even know elections were to be held—expressing surprise when I told him about it. Radjen said he would back whoever offered the hope of prosperity to his down-and-out corner of Republika Srpska. He probably ended up voting, as many Bosnian Serbs did, for the hard-line nationalists who conned or frightened people into supporting them. This is sad, but policymakers who may now wish to reconsider our engagement in Bosnia should remember that, just as America played a major role in deciding the course of the war, which was ended after President Clinton belatedly agreed to bomb the

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Serbs, America can play a major role in deciding the course of the peace. We are not at history's mercy; we can be the shapers of it.

It was in Banja Luka that I found an oddly hopeful sign about the direction of things. I was looking for a teacher, Milos Bojinovic, who headed the city's wartime Bureau for the Removal of Populations and Exchange of Material Goods, which was in charge of the administrative side of ethnic cleansing. I found him at home at two-thirty on a weekday afternoon, drunk. For two hours, he spoke in slurred words about how he had been a humanitarian helping Muslims and Croats get out of town. It was alcoholic rubbish. I learned much more when I visited his school. A bulletin board at the entrance listed after-hours activities, like the photo club, acting club, and so forth. Someone had improvised a few new offerings. One was titled "Chetnikism," a euphemism for Serbian nationalism. The instructor was listed as "Dr. Seselj," the most notorious warlord. The time, "Nonstop." The place, "Greater Serbia." Another improvised activity, "Butchery."

These jottings had been on the board for some time; nobody cared enough to erase them. I mentioned this to a friend in Sarajevo, Igor Baros, and he responded as though I had announced that Karadzic had been captured by SFOR. "That's a great sign," he said. "It's better than anything the politicians agree on. It shows they think these things are jokes. Their people died for nothing." True enough, but, as Baros knows, the Serbs remain a long distance from accepting the full truth. They still view themselves as victims and don't want their old neighbors to return. It would be hopelessly naïve to suggest that their view will change in a few years, but it would be needlessly pessimistic to suggest that refugees will never be able to return to their homes. It is between those poles—a few years and never—that changes will occur.

Nedret Mujkanovic is a human metaphor for healing the wounds of war. When the conflict began, Mujkanovic was finishing his work as a surgical intern in Tuzla, and the Bosnian army decided to send him, through Serb lines, into the besieged enclave of Srebrenica, which had just a few doctors, and none with surgery experience. In Srebrenica, Mujkanovic often operated by candlelight, under fire, with no anesthesia. He lost precise count but thinks he performed 1,400 operations in nine months. He amputated legs and arms, pulled shrapnel out of stomachs and heads, and so on. I first ran into him at the Tuzla airport in 1993, when he was evacuated from Srebrenica by U.N. peacekeepers. A day later, I spent three hours listening to his horrifying tales of battlefield surgery in a medieval operating theater. He embodied much of what I admired about Bosnia: in addition to Muslims, he operated on captured Serb soldiers and protected them from the retribution that many people in Srebrenica desired.

Five years later, I walked into Sarajevo's Holiday Inn, which has been restored and now looks just as ugly as it did before the war, and met Mujkanovic in the lobby. I had remembered it as a cold and grubby place filled with weary journalists. But now the guests are aid officials, businessmen, politicians, and—amazingly—some tourists. Mujkanovic looked ten years younger than the last time we had met, and once more he had a surprising tale to tell.

As the war wound down, he decided to become a plastic surgeon, but plastic surgeons in Bosnia were unfamiliar with state-of-the-art practices or anything close to them. So Mujkanovic got in his car and drove the tortuous route to Zagreb, where, without the benefit of any introduction, he presented himself to a plastic surgeon in the Croatian capital and asked to be trained. The surgeon agreed. After a few months, Mujkanovic went to Slovenia, where, once again, he presented himself to a renowned specialist in the field and, once more, asked to be trained. Over the next two years he visited Austria, Italy, and Britain to further his expertise before finally returning to Tuzla

"I knew the war would finish sometime but that medical problems would continue," Mujkanovic told me, speaking the good English he had learned in the last five years. "For the young population, during the war a scar on the face ... made them feel more important, but now it's a problem. They are coming everyday into my department, and they want to have corrections. During the war, they were very proud to have the scars, but now they want to remove them."

For the past two years, he also has been a member of the parliament—this is why we met in Sarajevo, where the parliament was in session—but he does not plan to serve another term. "I don't want to be in politics," he said. "I have my job, and my job is beautiful." Mujkanovic is thoughtful, knows his country well, and knows what will be needed for recovery. I asked whether Bosnia will survive. He was silent far longer than I expected. "I think it will be okay because America wants it to be okay," he said slowly. "It's very important that America is here. I believe in America. I don't believe in the English or French."

Of course, not even America's best efforts can enable Bosnia to return to life as it was before or even come close to it. Too many historic buildings have been destroyed, too much of the country's multi-religious fabric has been torn beyond repair. And there are too many roads in Bosnia like the narrow lane I followed one morning. The road, heading out of town, tracked alongside a lovely creek that nourished an oasis of trees and grass and birds. It led to a building Sarajevans know by the name of Jagomir. Inside the renovated building, behind a locked door, under the watch of a white-cloaked orderly, I found the young man who had been shot under my window at the Holiday Inn. Haris Bahtanovic, whose trembling hands are as soft as an infant's, thinks aliens have implanted a device in his head, and he thinks Sylvester Stallone is his father. He has been institutionalized since he was felled by that sniper. A doctor who cares for him at Jagomir Psychiatric Hospital shook her head from side to side when I asked for a prognosis. Bosnia may recover in some way, but Haris, it seems, shall not. •

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SCIENCE SEES THE LIGHT

By Gregg Easterbrook

Suppose you accept the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe. Here's what you believe, roughly according to the model proposed by Alan Guth, a physicist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

You believe that, once upon a time, all the potential of the cosmos—*all* the potential for a firmament of 40 billion galaxies at last count—was packed into a point smaller than a proton. You believe that within this plenum of the incipient cosmos was neither hypercompressed matter nor superdense energy nor any tangible substance. The genesis plenum was a "false vacuum" through which coursed a weightless, empty quantum-mechanical probability framework called a "scalar field." Probably you're not totally clear on what a "scalar field" is, but then neither are most Ph.D.s.

Next, you believe that, when the Big Bang sounded, the universe expanded from a pinpoint to cosmological size in far less than one second—space itself hurtling outward in a torrent of pure physics, the bow wave of the new cosmos moving at trillions of times the speed of light. You believe that this process unleashed such powerful distortions that, for an instant, the hatchling universe was curved to a surreal degree. Extreme curvature caused normally rare "virtual particles" to materialize from the quantum netherworld in cornucopian numbers, the stuff of existence being "created virtually out of nothing," as *Scientific American* once phrased it.

Further, you believe that, as subatomic particles began to unbuckle from the inexplicable proto-reality, both matter and antimatter formed. Immediately these commodities began to collide and annihilate themselves, vanishing as mysteriously as they came. The only reason our universe is here today is that the Bang was slightly asymmetrical, its yield favoring matter over antimatter by about one part per 100 million. Owing to this, when the stupendous cosmic commencement day ended amid sundering energies beyond comprehension, a residue of standard matter survived, and from it the galaxies formed. That is to say: You believe that a microscopic, transparent, empty point in primordial space-time contained not just one universe but enough potential for 100 million universes.

It's wise to take the Big Bang hypothesis seriously, since considerable evidence weighs in its favor. The galaxies are expanding away from one another as if they had once been in the same place, then hurled outward; the interstellar void is slightly warmer than absolute zero, suggesting the universe was once superheated by something much stronger than the output of stars; the earliest nebulae appear to be composed of precisely the mix of elements that Big Bang calculations suggest. Yet, for sheer extravagant implausibility, nothing in theology or metaphysics can hold a candle to the Bang. Surely, if this description of the cosmic genesis came from the Bible or the Koran rather than the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it would be treated as a preposterous myth.

Just as surely, the sort of majestic events hypothesized by current thinking about the Big Bang seem hauntingly similar in character to other, more traditional arguments about splendid powers at the core of existence. Something extremely grand must have called forth our firmament, and whether that something was natural or supernatural may be mere semantics. Reflecting on this, Allan Sandage, one of the world's foremost astronomers, recently proposed that the Big Bang is best understood as "a miracle" triggered by some kind of transcendent power. The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Charles Townes, chief inventor of the laser, suggests that "to think that science already knows enough to be certain there are no mystical forces is illogical." Other prominent researchers are beginning to say much the same.

In the century since Darwin, the arc of science has pointed toward displacing belief in anything beyond genes, machines, and the vibration of atoms. Many have waited, expectantly or even impatiently, for the moment when science fully refutes obsolete conceptions of meaning and purpose. Now, however, researchers are encountering profound riddles on many of the very points most concerned with the larger questions of life: What caused the universe? What came before? How did life begin? Why are natural laws and physical constants amenable to biology and consciousness?

In part because it has been assumed that science would inexorably prove existence to be no more than a chance manifestation of pitiless mechanical forces, the

Adapted from *Beside Still Waters: Searching for Meaning in an Age of Doubt* (William Morrow).

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main current of postmodern thought in philosophy, literature, art, and their mass-cult equivalents has been silted with gray. But as bleak worldviews deconstruct themselves to the point of depletion—if nothing really matters, why even bother to say that?—such thinking is starting to change. New findings in science point toward a buoyant view of our being: one in which life is favored, not improbable, and the universe a welcoming place, not an indurate domain. As science finds more to existence than previously understood, other intellectual disciplines may be inveigled toward a more hopeful view of the human prospect. Western thought may experience a revival of meaning.

Rightly or wrongly, modernism has treated science and meaning as warring superpowers. One important cause of the modern era was the sequence of events in which traditional assumptions were subject to humiliation at the hands of those in lab coats: from Charles Lyell's mid-nineteenth-century demonstration that the Earth is ancient and weathered rather than newly formed, to Darwin's enunciation of evolutionary descent, to Freud's claimed clinical proof that all human beliefs were "illusions" rooted in a "universal neurosis" of lesser minds, to Einstein's renowned question of whether God had any choice in the creation of the universe.

Some of the conflict between science and meaning has been administrative, tracing to researchers' needs to win academic freedom in university systems once flavored by church politics. It is useful to recall that, as recently as Victoria's reign, the Anglican Church controlled hiring decisions at Cambridge and Oxford. One reason Charles Darwin was so touted by the British scientific establishment, while Alfred Russel Wallace, the codiscoverer of evolutionary theory, was practically blackballed, was that Darwin was an agnostic who threw the rector class into a tizzy, while Wallace was a believer who spoke about "the unseen universe of spirit."

Bureaucratic politics aside, aspects of the conflict between science and meaning reflect deep philosophical division. Postwar science has not only searched for material explanations for all outcomes, as it should, but at times it has evinced evangelical enthusiasm for the overthrow of belief. Steven Weinberg, who won the Nobel for physics in 1979, has famously supposed: "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it seems pointless." Francis Crick, one of the discoverers of DNA, once proclaimed, almost with satisfaction: "Your joys and sorrows, your memories and ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules." The Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins, who holds a chair in "public understanding of science," promotes the gray view of life with such ardor that he might be dubbed Mister Meaninglessness. He has written that the universe "has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but pointless indifference."

Statements like these beg the rejoinder: Your life may be meaningless, but not mine! Nevertheless, such sentiments underlie the perception that science has debunked not only the divine but even modest human dreams. Most influential in this regard was the powerful 1972 book *Chance and Necessity* by the Nobel-winning French biologist Jacques Monod. Monod asserted that everything about the living world could now be explained without recourse to purpose, significance, or larger powers: "Man knows at last that he is alone in the universe's unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance."

A quarter-century later, the picture seems much less clear. Take the origin of life. Evolution glides over this most engaging of biological questions: natural selection describes the way organisms that already exist adapt to change in habitats that already exist, but it is silent on how the process begins. Even cellular forms of life are so fantastically complex, so different from the azoic world and so fragile compared to it, that it is difficult to imagine how an incomplete, initial organism could have functioned before its components were sufficiently established as to be capable of replication and development. Owing to this, researchers, such as the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould of Harvard University, have depicted life as a chemical fluke so wildly improbable that it represents little more than a data blip.

Patinaed with what seems like objective science, the notion of life as a vacuous accident is central to contemporary intellectual orthodoxy. But, while life may be pointless, that's an opinion, not an impartial induction. And it is surely an opinion leveraged by the desire of many thinkers to gain retribution against belief by treating it as dismissively as faith once treated science. As Alan Dressler, a prominent astronomer, notes: "Many scientists seem to be on a crusade to run down human worth, because they think this will destroy the old religious arrogance of believing that man is the center of the universe. But nobody believes that anymore, anyway."

More to the point, the life-as-fluke view may be about to collapse. Christian de Duve, a Nobel-winning Belgian biologist, says: "Eventually we will understand that the origin of life was not a highly improbable cosmic jest but rather an almost obligatory outcome of chemical structures, given the right conditions." A branch of research generally called "complexity" theory has made progress toward showing that elaborate living molecules such as the six-billion-point strands of human DNA are surprisingly plausible. Ian Stewart, a mathematician at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom, has suggested that mathematical rule structures inherent in existence may eventually be shown to operate as if life were their goal, encouraging the development of animation. "DNA may be just one of the many secrets of life, secrets we are only beginning to glimpse," Stewart suggests.

Conventional views about the significance of evolu-

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tion may collapse as well. Darwinian theory ranks among the foremost achievements of rationality, yet many proponents insist on presenting adaptation not as a glorious manifestation of the life force but rather as just another vacant, goin'-nowhere mechanism. In this view, there is no evolutionary arrow. The living world has not gotten better or more interesting or more diverse over time; it has merely ground out meaningless genetic responses to meaningless environmental change. Imputing a positive arrow to evolution is decried as "anthropocentrism" because women and men would then be seen as superior to earlier organisms. (Some factions in evolutionary debate become *very* offended at the suggestion that *Homo sapiens* is a higher accomplishment than *Australopithecus.*) Development of intellect is depicted not as nature's highest known achievement but as a random event, signifying nothing. Yet, as de Duve notes, if you "chart out the last 500 million years, you will find that nearly every animal has steadily increased its neurological capacity, if only because brainpower is a marvelous adaptation mechanism." De Duve adds, "Intellectuals and even many scientists mistakenly think that a chance result means the result is insignificant. Chance did play a large role in evolution, but the result is highly meaningful."

New thinking about the Big Bang also suggests that the universe is not an indifferent engineering scaffold but is steeped in resplendent mystery. Supposing that entire constellations really did pop forth from bare pockets of empty space, some creative process of almost infinite power and scope must have been involved: if nothing else, the theological notion of genesis *ex nihilo,* "out of nothing," is looking better all the time. Then there's the little conundrum of what caused the Big Bang. For years, researchers have shrugged this issue off, as if only freshmen or rubes would get hung up on it. (A decade or so ago, I asked an eminent astronomer what came before the Big Bang. He scrunched his face and replied: "I can't stand that question!") Pressed, Bang theorists would say that the genesis detonation destroyed all information about the previous condition, and therefore the subject is forever moot. Increasingly, that has come to seem like a dodge akin to the way pastors and rabbis dodge questions about God's wrath or heaven's origin. The new consensus among cosmologists seems to be that, until Big Bang theory can account for the prior condition, it's all speculation.

Beyond this is the "fine tuning" question—the enigma of why the cosmos assembled itself with stable physical laws and with the kind of natural constants that led to at least one long-lived planet suitable for life.

Researchers have calculated that, if the ratio of matter and energy to the volume of space, a value called "omega," had not been within about one-quadrillionth of one percent of ideal at the moment of the Big Bang, the incipient universe would have collapsed back on itself or suffered runaway relativity effects. Instead, our firmament is stable and geometrically normal: "smooth," in the argot of cosmology postdocs. Had gravity been only slightly stronger, stars would flame so fiercely they would burn out in a single year rather than shine for the ten billion years expected for our sun. The universe would be a kingdom of cinders, devoid of life. Had the "strong" force that holds the interior of atoms together been only slightly weaker, subatomic particles would have attenuated into vapor: stars would not have shone in the first place. The one form of life confirmed so far depends on carbon, which is nearly unique among the elements in having the ability to form exceedingly complicated molecules from small energy inputs, serving an essential requirement of biology. Like most elements, carbon is forged inside stars. But, if it were not for a seemingly highly unlikely quirk of the "nuclear resonance" of stellar reactions, carbon would not exist. The English physicist Roger Penrose once estimated the odds against a cosmos with this one's pleasantly anthropic physical laws as about one in ten to the three hundredth power, a figure far larger than the number of atomic particles believed to exist in the universe.

At the next level, the question is why there are any physical laws, rather than cosmic anarchy. "When you ask scientists how physical law got there, most will just shrug because they haven't the slightest idea," says Leon Lederman, a physicist who won the Nobel in 1988. "It is very puzzling which came first, physical law or the first universe," says the Big Bang physicist Andrei Linde of Stanford University. "Without a cosmos, where would you write your physical law? But, without physical law, how would you start the cosmos?"

Some argue that physical laws are as observed because the present outcome was the only one possible. But quantum mechanics posits otherwise and has produced considerable indications that the universe might well have emerged with crushing gravity, vaporous distortions, or other untenable qualities. Until such time as

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science can discern the underlying reasons for physical law—and "we're nowhere near that yet," says Saul Perlmutter, an astrophysicist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory—higher influence will stand as good a chance of being confirmed as disproved, and the meaningless-coincidence analysis will recede.

One scientific idea inspired by the seeming zillion-to-one character of the firmament is a budding theory of the "multiverse." This notion, now advocated by several credentialed researchers, trades on the possibility that, if our universe emerged out of nothing, additional universes may emerge from nothing as well. New firmaments may burst forth in other dimensions as often as billions of times per second, Linde estimates. As multiple heavens are forged, chance determines physical laws; but the deck is shuffled so many times that all outcomes become possible.

Notions of a boundless, overarching multiverse, far larger even than the 13-billion-light-year realm that present telescopes see, arise both from quantum reasoning and from a desire to account for our auspicious cosmos without calling on either supernatural influence or incredible chains of blind luck: for, if universes are created by the bushel basket, it seems more believable that the occasional heavens, such as ours, would come out pleasingly "smooth." Thus, theories of the multiverse may sustain conceptions of an autonomous, wholly natural cosmos.

But, rather than the heartless domain assumed by contemporary thought, a multiverse would be an almost preternaturally sanguine place. After all, if physicists such as Guth and Linde are right, and entire universes can materialize from nothing, then the firmament as a whole may never run down, endlessly drawing new vitality from the quantum netherworld. In recent years, researchers at Princeton, Tufts, and elsewhere have published papers suggesting that the creation of universes is an eternal process, infinitely self-sustaining. Couple this possibility to the notion of biology as favored by inherent aspects of nature, and the intellectual transformation is startling: the universe wants life, and stars will shine forever!

As research has begun to veer toward the metaphysical, the interplay of science and religion, seemingly a dead issue a decade ago, has made a comeback, now growing into one of the liveliest arenas of intellectual discourse. Theology finds itself warming to science, especially to the Big Bang with its discrete, Genesis-like moment of rapid creation, and to the ethereal notions of quantum mechanics, such as that particles can travel from A to C without passing through B. Outside the creationist extremes, religious leaders are taking tentative steps toward natural selection—Pope John Paul II in 1996 called Darwinism "more than just a hypothesis"—as they come to understand both how strong the evidence is and that evolutionary biology behaves with a profound elegance that may suggest larger influence. New schools of thought with names like "design inference" are staking claims to the notion that circumstances such as favorable physical law will eventually be understood as divine latency.

But the Maker cannot be proven from natural beneficence anymore than God could be disproved by indications of impersonal forces. Postwar literary and philosophical thinking have routinely exhibited the mistaken assumption that, if evidence of purely material natural forces is found, then all forces must be purely material. It would be an equivalent error of logic to assume that, if metaphysical grandeur in nature is uncovered, then a lawgiver must be present. All that can be said with assurance is that science is trending away from dispirited views of a merciless cosmos toward a new vision of creation as poignantly favorable to life. That is more than enough to constitute news.

News enough, in fact, that it may inspire a historic shift in prevailing winds of thought. But this is unlikely to happen quickly because modernism is deeply informed by the notion that science has overthrown meaning. Assumptions of purpose-as-exposed run from the nineteenth-century onset of existential dread (Kierkegaard: "Depression is the most faithful mistress I have known"), to the trench-warfare fatalism of the lost generation, to the attempt of logical positivism to banish all metaphysical ideals that cannot be empirically observed, to the mid-century advent of stylish despair (Sartre: "All human actions are equivalent [and] all are on principle doomed to failure"), to the inversion of art from the search for transcendence to an ethic of mandatory disdain (as Frederick Turner of the University of Texas points out, work that sneers at humanity is what the art establishment now lauds, while art that pursues beauty is looked down on as unsuitable), to today's regnant postmodern axiom that there are no truths, only constructs of social context (Stanley Fish: Beliefs are just "norms to which you have been falsely enslaved").

Countless events in the twentieth century do support dismal notions of life: from the Somme to the Holocaust to Rwanda, it can seem that, if anything, Camus and Foucault were understating the case. But countless counterexamples of courage, idealism, and compassion could also be cited to argue the opposite conclusion.

What is telling is that modernism has tended toward the gray in part because it often reads too much heartlessness into misunderstandings of science. Consider the theories of relativity. These masterworks are perceived as strikes against higher purpose, it being common to hear that Einstein proved that the universe is autonomous in origin. Yet Einstein's deductions have nothing to do with the creation of the cosmos, concerning instead the mechanics of gravity and light. Einstein was a skeptic of Big Bang thinking, preferring the Greek notion that the cosmos is a static, eternal realm that had no specific moment of genesis. Personally, Einstein was a moderate on issues of belief, once saying that, the more he learned, the more he believed in a supreme being.

Then there's the name, "relativity theory." Coming at

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a time when the trajectory of Western thought was toward relativism in values, culture, and history, Einstein's work seemed to give hard-science vertebrae to contentions that there are no underlying truths or first principles. But rarely has a theory had a less apt cognomen. Einstein's assertion in his first breakthrough, the Special Theory of Relativity, is that central aspects of nature are decidedly *not* relative—natural laws remain the same regardless of motion, and the speed of light is an absolute for all observers despite frame of reference. His second breakthrough, the General Theory of Relativity, concerns the way gravity molds space-time. Einstein could have called his accomplishments the Special Theory of a Cosmic Absolute and the General Theory of Gravitational Absolute. How might twentieth-century thought have developed if its preeminent scientific mind had chosen to favor the word "absolute" instead of "relativity"?

Similarly, the second law of thermodynamics, the "entropy" law, has been widely misperceived as hard-science vindication of eventual desolation. This axiom is usually depicted as holding that systems inevitability consume energy, lose complexity, and decline to a worthless "disordered" condition that can never be reversed: a log can burn to ash, but ash cannot be reformed into a log. During the 1970s energy crunch, it was fashionable for commentators to cite petroleum depletion as foretold by entropy physics. Some thinkers have interpreted the second law much more broadly, saying that it guarantees the universe will end as a cold, blurred nothingness, and, if creation is fated to a senseless demise, then existence must be without point. Thomas Pynchon first caught the eye of the literary world with a short story, *Entropy*, which presented a second-law analysis of existence as inconsequential; the concept would help frame *Gravity's Rainbow* and other works. Since Pynchon, others have seized on the second law as systematic proof that all beings, even gods, are just marking time until inevitable universal doom.

This kind of thinking sounds nicely ponderous, but it overlooks time scale: if the universe is someday to suffer an entropic heat-death, that event waits as much as trillions of years into the future, a span so unfathomably long it might as well be eternity. And, if entropy is a natural agent of decay, life appears to be its leading foe. Earth-borne biology represents "four billion years of defiance of the second law," as the theorist Stuart Kauffman of the Santa Fe Institute has said. Carbon-based organisms have grown steadily more complicated and interesting, employed exponentially more energy, and appear millennia away from exhausting the resources of this one small globe, to say nothing of the immense 100-billion-star galaxy above.

Those who cite entropy as proof of cosmic pointlessness might object that the Earth continuously draws new energy from the sun, allowing local defiance of the second law; someday the sun will dim out, and the universe itself will never receive any power infusion, leaving the gray view triumphant over the very long term. But findings of cosmology and physics are beginning to suggest that the second law need not be destiny.

Current Big Bang theory implies that the genesis merrily violated all laws of the conservation of energy, making the stuff of reality essentially out of thin air. (There is a technical objection to that sentence, but one that ought to concern only specialists.) In turn, one reason so many scientists take seriously the idea of whole universes leaping from the void is that, in particle accelerators and cloud chambers, they observe something from nothing, albeit on a modest scale.

A phenomenon called the "Higgs field" appears to pervade the universe, and, although the Higgs field looks and acts like a vacuum, occasionally subatomic particles pop out of it—that is, out of nowhere. This suggests there may be natural mechanisms capable of replacing what the cosmos consumes over time; some of those mechanisms may even be at work today, in the post-Bang heavens. Last December, astronomers detected a distant "hypernova" that, for an instant, appeared to generate more gamma rays than the rest of the universe combined. The power seemed to emanate from a relatively tiny point, hinting that radical energy-creation mechanisms may exist, amending the second law on a cosmic basis.

Contemporary culture has misunderstood other aspects of science in ways that needlessly imply absence of significance. In 1968, for instance, Francis Crick lamentably pronounced the basic form of DNA a "frozen accident," hit upon by chance and then endlessly copied. Subsequent research has instead found the double helix and its four-base amino-acid substructure to be an exceptionally sophisticated configuration for preserving and passing along information—intimating wisdom and subtlety at the beginnings of life, not some dumb blunder. Nevertheless, the phrase "frozen accident" has caught on in numerous fields of commentary, including historicism (the American century had nothing to do with merit; it was just a frozen accident of ocean geography), sociology (that some cultures flourish while others falter is a frozen accident of resources and climate), economics (profitable firms are merely exploiting the frozen accidents of random market breaks), and so on.

"Chaos" theory is a similar example. This branch of mathematics became an intellectual and pop-culture sensation partly because of the fine book *Chaos* by James Gleick, which has spawned dozens of imitators, but mainly on the misperception that chaos theory constitutes scientific proof of the haphazard character of life.

Chaos mathematics has two main contentions. The first is that outcomes of complicated interactions may be impossible to predict; the second is that simple sets of rules can lead to intricate results. Unless you were rooting for the development of some kind of all-controlling ultimate computer, both these contentions are easily seen as life-affirming. That no amount of data may be sufficient to predict some outcomes suggests that even

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the Maker could not know the future and, therefore, is watching human events unfold; those dark moments of history would make a lot more sense if they came as surprises rather than as components of a divine plan. And the notion that simple rules can create elaborate structure sounds favorable to consciousness, suggesting that the ability of fairly basic evolutionary precepts to produce complex minds would not represent a pointless luck of the draw but rather fulfillment of something inherent in the natural order. Affirmatively is not, however, how chaos theory has been perceived. In most citations, this mathematics is treated as a proof that events are out of control or signify nothing.

During the centuries when superstitions were common and churches suppressed rational thought, there was power to the view that society would be served if science overturned belief. Rousseau, for example, thought spiritual convictions undercut social compassion by allowing people to assume God would provide for the troubled: better if men and women realized they had only one another to fall back on. As Claude Welch has written, nineteenth-century German reformers warmed quickly to Darwin because they regarded institutional faith as adverse to the working class (preaching submission now and rewards in heaven) and thus favored any scientific theory perceived as diminishing the divine. Many turn-of-the-century thinkers, such as the anthropologist James Frazer, viewed scientific deflation of spiritual beliefs as a necessary step in social evolution.

But today, in the liberal Western democracies, the torching of purpose is backfiring. Not just religious doctrines but even the higher convictions of humanism are being tossed onto the bonfire, the sophisticated person expected to believe nothing. Education seems adrift, its top levels so gun-shy of being accused of belief as to avoid terms like "right" or "wrong." As David Scott, a former physicist and now chancellor of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, notes: "Modernism has directed exhaustive objective focus on the world as a database but excluded anything having to do with meaning. This causes wisdom to drop out of favor as a goal of education."

As science continues to be perceived as having exposed life as an automated artifice, a strange kind of homage to meaninglessness has risen up, particularly among the opinion-maker cohort. New scientific evidence that suggests the world is bereft of meaning is welcomed, intimations of purpose discomfit. Imagine a faculty meeting at any Ivy League university or a top-staff meeting at any major East Coast news organization. In rushes a courier to announce that an archaeologist has just discovered proof that the founding scriptures of all major faiths are forgeries; there would be broad smiles and acclaim. Then imagine, instead, that a courier announces that a biologist has just discovered physical evidence of the soul; faculty types would fidget unhappily, while media types would scoff.

Embrace of meaninglessness may be a valid philosophical choice, but it can also become a justification for selfishness on the part of Western elites. Richard Dawkins of Oxford, who has cheerfully written that human beings are "machines for propagating DNA" and that this "is every living object's sole reason for living," further contends that, in a universe of "blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, others are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason for it." How convenient that someone who has himself won a privileged position in life blames only a callous universe—not lack of action by persons in privileged positions—for the needs of the less fortunate. If there is higher purpose then we have obligations to one another and will be judged if those obligations go unmet. If it's all pointless anyway then why not focus on enjoying your ironic airs, your capital gains, and your information-age sinecure?

Debate about meaning in life is endlessly sidetracked into all-or-nothing extremes. Traditionalism insists that purpose is preexistent, that the universe was called forth already possessing full metaphysical import. Postmodernism insists that purpose is impossible: we arrived by chance, and chance will someday reclaim us, the universe caring not one whit either way. What's neglected is the intermediate possibility—that our being is sacred and profound, regardless of whether there are higher forces.

The Nobel physicist Steven Weinberg, the same fun guy who once called life "a more-or-less farcical outcome of a chain of accidents," has also said that men and women "can grant significance to life by loving each other, investigating the universe, and doing other worthwhile things." Given Weinberg's stature, his pronouncements about a pointless existence are oft-cited in philosophical debate—traditionalists denouncing them as nihilism, intellectuals praising them as agreeable derision. Hardly anybody ever quotes the second half of Weinberg's argument, exactly because it is so reasonable.

Regardless of whether our mettle is natural or supernatural, purpose is something people can make by leading moral lives and helping carry one another's burdens. Here is a logic of meaning that seems inescapable. If it is true that a divinity gave us being, it is incumbent on people to treat one another lovingly and with justice, earning that divinity's good will. Or, if it is true that no divinity exists, then it is incumbent on people to treat one another lovingly and with justice, honoring the life force they all share. In either case, the human promise is the same.

"When I talk to audiences about the size and age of the cosmos," the astronomer Dressler notes, "people often say, 'It makes me feel so insignificant.' I answer, 'The bigger and more impersonal the universe is, the more meaningful you are, because this vast, impersonal place needs something significant to fill it up.' We've abandoned the old belief that humanity is at the physical center of the universe but must come back to believing we are at the center of meaning." •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Heights and Descents

I've pretty much avoided film festivals through the years. I've gone—only once—to four festivals, Venice, Berlin, Karlovy Vary, and Jerusalem. (The last is *sui generis*: the intrinsic quality is high, but the whole event is part of the being of a state.) I don't "go" to the New York festival: while it's on, I simply visit other theaters than the usual screening rooms. Most festivals are sales conferences, full of bustle and ballyhoo. As for their schedules, they remind me of *La Grande Bouffe*, that French film in which four gourmets get together to eat themselves to death.

Then came Telluride. I had heard of it, of course—this was the festival's twenty-fifth anniversary—but I'd had only hints of its character. My wife and I were invited this year, so graciously that we had to accept. For one thing, I was one of the people asked to select and introduce a film, and I had the chance to choose and talk about Karoly Makk's 1971 film, *Love*, with Lili Darvas. But the chief attribute of this festival, I quickly learned, is that it really is festive: because the people who organize and run the event are mad about film.

It's held for five days over the Labor Day weekend. The setting is very high in the Colorado Rockies. (The only skimpy element is oxygen.) Beautiful beyond amazement. The roster of events is overflowing, thus with a touch of *bouffe*, but it is greatly varied, with new films from many parts of the globe and old films of special interest. The public buys up all available tickets far ahead of time: most of these people have been coming for years, and they travel great distances. Every year distinguished guests are invited from several countries: this year Bertrand Tavernier (his sixth visit), John Boorman, Errol Morris, Michael Ritchie, Monte Hellman, Philip Lopate, Vittorio Storaro, John Simon, B. Ruby Rich, Kevin Brownlow, Horton Foote, Peter Bogdanovich, and others. Most of these people appeared in public interviews or conversations or panels that were part of the schedule. I had a 90-minute conversation with André Gregory, of *My Dinner with . . .*, the director of the theater production of *Uncle Vanya* that Louis Malle filmed. (Gregory is now preparing a New York production of Wallace Shawn's *The Designated Mourner*, which has already been filmed.)

Pleasures abounded. For me, a prime treat, arranged by Tom Luddy and Bill Pence, the heads of the festival, was the tribute to Meryl Streep. It was held in the Opera House, the old and pretty theater of the town (one of the festival's seven venues). First, we saw a bill of substantial clips from twelve Streep films in chronological order: from the supermarket checkout girl in *The Deer Hunter* through the Burne-Jones heroine of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and the Australian mother in *A Cry in the Dark* to the Italian-born Iowa farm wife of *The Bridges of Madison County*. Each of these performances was powerful when it first appeared, for the range displayed and for the *wholeness* of each one—no sense of masquerade or exhibition. But to see this mini-anthology in an hour or so was to be wonderstruck by the sheer physicality of each role. The checkout girl moves and gestures differently from the Iowa wife, whose Italian origins become visible in the way she moves and gestures.

Then Streep came out onstage to the ovation she deserved and was presented with the festival's medallion. Then two chairs were provided, and she conversed for about half an hour with Roger Ebert. Throughout this talk, Streep tried to keep her tone as un-actressy as possible, friendly, informal, just a working woman with four children to think about as she keeps on with her career. (I wouldn't have preferred stuffy formality; still, I couldn't help suspecting that this was another characterization added to the twelve we had just seen.) Then the evening closed with a clip from *Postcards From the Edge*, Streep singing "I'm Checking Out (of the Heartbreak Hotel)." It can't quite be said that this number brought down the house: the house was already hers.

Next day the festival presented the world premiere of one of Streep's two new films, *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Comment later.

Sophie Marceau is not, or not yet, a Streep, but she is distinctly, engrossingly talented. French but fluent in English, she has been in films since she was 13 and is probably best known in the U.S. for Pialat's *Police* and an *Anna Karenina* (1997). Now Marceau appears in **Firelight** (Hollywood), which was written and directed by William Nicholson, author of *Shadowlands*, the play and film about

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Lolita. *Dominique Swain is a lissome nymphet, Jeremy Irons is an OK Humbert Humbert, Adrian Lyne's direction is lubricious. More faithful to the novel than the 1962 version; still, the divorce from Nabokov's prose reduces it. (Reviewed 10/5/98)* **A Merry War.** *A 1930s revolt against English philistinism by an angry young poet. Well acted, well derived from Orwell's* Keep the Aspidistra Flying. *(9/7/98)* **Regeneration.** *Intelligent, acute rendering of Pat Barker's book about Siegfried Sassoon's stay in a military hospital during World War I. (9/14&21/98)* **Saving Private Ryan.** *A good-enough war movie, with a tremendous opening sequence. D-Day in France is done by Steven Spielberg in top form; the following mission seems puny after it. (8/17&24/98)* **—SK**

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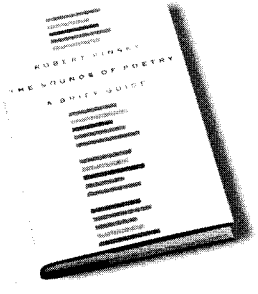

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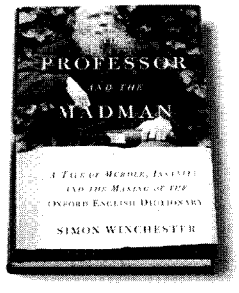

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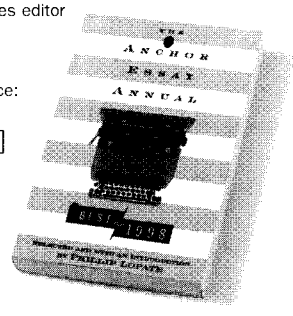

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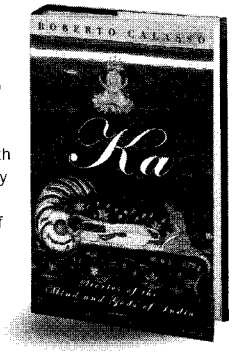

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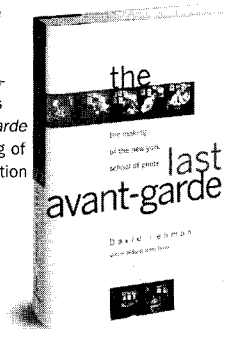

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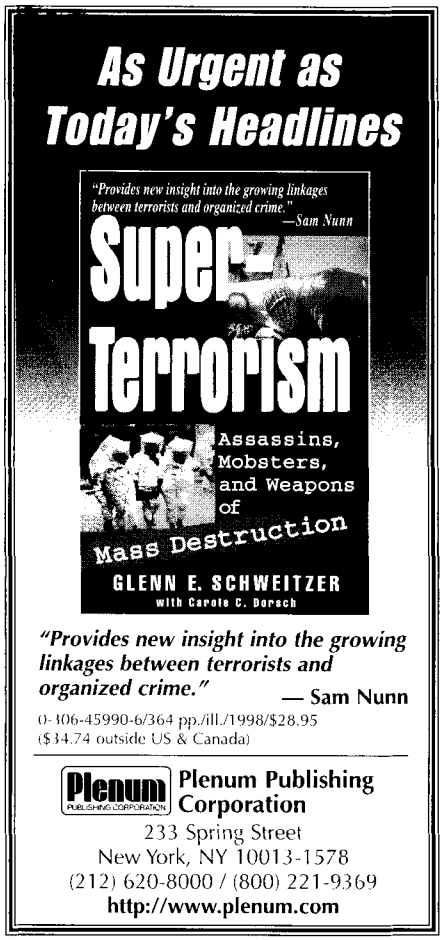
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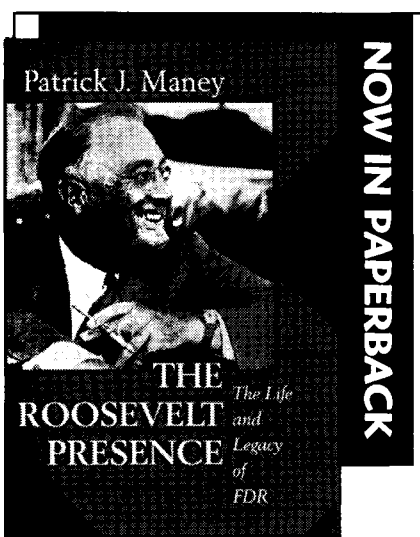
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C.S. Lewis and his American wife.

Firelight is a hybrid: a Victorian drama written, so to speak, today. It has a heart-tugging, twisty plot, full of "situations," that could have appealed to a Victorian author, except that no Victorian could have used the device that is the springboard of the action. Marceau plays a young woman of 1838, desperate for money, who applies for a highly paid assignment. A wealthy Englishman, married, wants a child. His wife, for reasons of health, cannot have one. He is looking for a young woman who will, for a generous fee, allow him to impregnate her. She will hand over the child to him, without knowledge of the father's name or whereabouts, and will promise never to seek out the child. Marceau gets the job.

The child, a girl, is born and handed over; the money is paid. But Marceau cannot forget her daughter. After seven years' search, she locates the child and gets herself engaged as governess in the household. The plot waxes.

Even before it swells, the plot is somewhat strained in itself; but it is never allowed to be by itself. The Victorian dress and décor are rich; Stephen Dillane is attractive and plausible as the father; and there is Marceau. She is so serious, so dignified, so true in her feelings, that we are convinced, or at least tolerant, of the bombazine story. All the stitchings of the plot fade almost to irrelevance because we are glad that they at least give Marceau the chance to be before us in a range of stressful scenes. Filmmakers of France and Britain and America, more Marceau, please.

Derek Jacobi plays Francis Bacon in **Love Is the Devil** (Strand), which was written and directed by John Maybury. With John Mathieson's camera and Chris Wimble's editing, Maybury's prime intent is to make the film suggest the raw, stark, aggressive quality of Bacon's paintings. To some extent he succeeds; also he succeeds in presenting frankly Bacon's masochistic homosexual private life. The very accomplished Jacobi deals easily with Bacon: the role doesn't strain his talent.

But for all its visual ingenuities and its candor, the film never engages us. It does little more than make clear what it is trying to do—a gallery of evidence like exhibits in a case. •

The Sleep of Reason

By Thomas Nagel

Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science by Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont

(Picador, 317 pp., $23)

I.

You will remember that in 1996 a physicist at New York University named Alan Sokal brought off a delicious hoax that displayed the fraudulence of certain leading figures in cultural studies. He submitted to the journal *Social Text* an article entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," espousing the fashionable doctrine that scientific objectivity is a myth, and combining heavy technical references to contemporary physics and mathematics with patently ridiculous claims about their broader philosophical, cultural, and political significance, supported by quotations in similar vein from prominent figures such as Lacan and Lyotard, and references to many more. The nonsense made of the science was so extreme that only a scientific ignoramus could have missed the joke.

Sokal's article expressed deep admiration for the views of two editors of *Social Text*, Stanley Aronowitz and Andrew Ross, quoting at length from Aronowitz's crack-brained social interpretations of quantum theory. The article was published in a special issue of *Social Text* devoted to science studies, Sokal revealed the hoax, and nothing has been quite the same since. We may hope that incompetents who pontificate about science as a social phenomenon without understanding the first thing about its content are on the way out, that they may some day be as rare as deaf music critics.

This book, published originally in French under the title *Impostures Intellectuelles*, is a follow-up to the article.

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Sokal and his coauthor, Jean Bricmont, a physicist at the University of Louvain, decided to produce a fuller discussion of the witless invocations of science and math by intellectuals in other fields. Since the most prominent culprits are French, they first published their book in France; but since the influence of these figures on American literary theory, feminism, and cultural studies is substantial, it is good that it has been translated into English.

Nearly half the book consists of extensive quotations of scientific gibberish from name-brand French intellectuals, together with eerily patient explanations of why it is gibberish. This is amusing at first, but it becomes gradually sickening. There is also a long and sensible chapter on skepticism, relativism, and the history and philosophy of science. An introduction and an epilogue discuss the political and cultural significance of the affair. Sokal's hilarious parody, with its 109 footnotes and 219 references, is reprinted here as an appendix, together with comments explaining many of the travesties of science that appear in it.

There are a few differences from the French version. Apart from minor changes, the authors have left out a chapter on Henri Bergson and his misunderstanding of the theory of relativity, thought not to be of sufficient interest to English-speaking readers, and they have added an article that Sokal published in *Dissent* about his reasons for producing the parody. (This second article was submitted to *Social Text*, but it was rejected "on the grounds that it did not meet their intellectual standards"—an unintended compliment.)

The book is somewhat repetitive: the basic idea is contained in the parody and Sokal's comments on it. But the parody alone is worth the price of the volume:

> Postmodern science provides a powerful refutation of the authoritarianism and elitism inherent in traditional science, as well as an empirical basis for a democratic approach to scientific work. For, as Bohr noted, "a complete elucidation of one and the same object may require diverse points of view which defy a unique description"—this is quite simply a fact about the world, much as the self-proclaimed empiricists of modernist science might prefer to deny it. In such a situation, how can a self-perpetuating secular priesthood of credentialed "scientists" purport to maintain a monopoly on the production of scientific knowledge?...
>
> A liberatory science cannot be complete without a profound revision of the canon of mathematics. As yet no such emancipatory mathematics exists, and we can only speculate upon its eventual content. We can see hints of it in the multidimensional and nonlinear logic of fuzzy systems theory; but this approach is still heavily marked by its origins in the crisis of late-capitalist production relations. Catastrophe theory, with its dialectical emphases on smoothness/discontinuity and metamorphosis/unfolding, will indubitably play a major role in the future mathematics; but much theoretical work remains to be done before this approach can become a concrete tool of progressive political praxis.

The chapters dealing in more detail with individual thinkers reveal that they are beyond parody. Sokal could not create anything as ridiculous as this, from Luce Irigaray:

> Is $E=Mc^2$ a sexed equation? Perhaps it is. Let us make the hypothesis that it is insofar as it privileges the speed of light over other speeds that are vitally necessary to us. What seems to me to indicate the possibly sexed nature of the equation is not directly its uses by nuclear weapons, rather it is having privileged what goes the fastest....

We are offered reams of this stuff, from Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Bruno Latour, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Régis Debray, and others, together with comments so patient as to be involuntarily comic. In response to Irigaray, for example, Sokal and Bricmont observe:

> Whatever one may think about the "other speeds that are vitally necessary to us," the fact remains that the relationship $E=Mc^2$ between energy (E) and mass (M) is experimentally verified to a high degree of precision, and it would obviously not be valid if the speed of light (c) were replaced by another speed.

The writers arraigned by Sokal and Bricmont use technical terms without knowing what they mean, refer to theories and formulas that they do not understand in the slightest, and invoke modern physics and mathematics in support of psychological, sociological, political, and philosophical claims to which they have no relevance. It is not always easy to tell how much is due to invincible stupidity and how much to the desire to cow the audience with fraudulent displays of theoretical sophistication. Lacan and Baudrillard come across as complete charlatans, Irigaray as an idiot, Kristeva and Deleuze as a mixture of the two. But these are delicate judgments.

Of course, anyone can be guilty of this kind of thing, but there does seem to be something about the Parisian situation that is particularly hospitable to reckless verbosity. Humanists in France do not have to learn anything about science, yet

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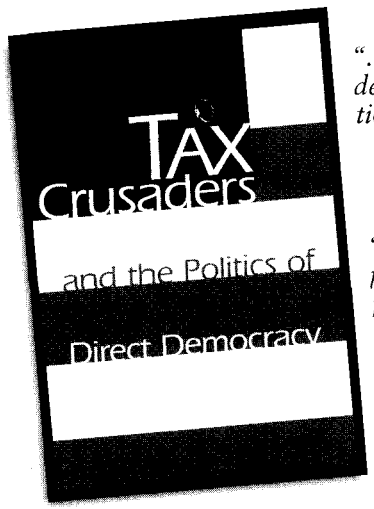

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those who become public intellectuals typically appear on stage in some kind of theoretical armor. It even affects politics. I remember that at a certain point after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, when the United Nations was working up its response, President Mitterrand declared on French television, "*Nous sommes dans une logique de guerre.*"

Mitterrand regarded himself as an intellectual, but at least it was fairly clear what he meant by this pretentious formulation. Yet listen to Baudrillard:

> In the Euclidean space of history, the shortest path between two points is the straight line, the line of Progress and Democracy. But this is only true of the linear space of the Enlightenment. In our non-Euclidean *fin de siècle* space, a baleful curvature unfailingly deflects all trajectories. This is doubtless linked to the sphericity of time (visible on the horizon of the end of the century, just as the earth's sphericity is visible on the horizon at the end of the day) or the subtle distortion of the gravitational field.

Sokal and Bricmont emphasize that their criticism is limited to the abuse of science and mathematics, and that they are not qualified to evaluate the contributions of these writers to psychology, philosophy, sociology, political theory, and literary criticism. They merely suggest, cautiously, that the dishonesty and the incompetence shown in the passages that they examine might lead one to approach the writers' other work with a critical eye. Clearly all this name-dropping is intended to bolster the reputations of these writers as deep thinkers, and its exposure should arouse skepticism.

Sokal and Bricmont are playing it close to the vest here. They could no doubt find passages in these same works having nothing to do with science that are nonsensical, irresponsible, and indifferent to the meanings of words. Yet there is no direct way to refute a fogbank, and so they have adopted the safer strategy of focusing on the occasions when these writers rashly try to invoke the authority of science and mathematics by using a vocabulary that does have a clear meaning, and that could not serve their purposes, literal or metaphorical, unless it were being used more or less correctly. This also allows them to explain why the scientific material introduced, even if it were not completely garbled, would be irrelevant to the literary, psychological, or social topics being discussed.

I am not sure how many admirers of these writers, or of postmodernist thought generally, will read this book. It is important to follow up on the positive effects of the original hoax, but will teachers of cultural studies and feminist theory go through these long-suffering explanations of total confusion about topology, set theory, complex numbers, relativity, chaos theory, and Gödel's theorem? The scientifically literate will find them amusing up to a point, but for those whose minds have been formed by this material, it may be too late. Or they may claim that these particular writers are not as important as the sales of their books suggest, and that other postmodern theorists do not misappropriate science. Derrida, for example, is conspicuously absent from the book except for one quote in the original parody, because that was an isolated instance, produced in response to a question at a conference.

Yet the effect of a hatchet job like this, if it succeeds, is not just to undermine the reputations of some minor celebrities; it is also to produce a shift in the climate of opinion, so that insiders with doubts about the intelligibility of all this "theory" are no longer reluctant to voice them, and outsiders who have grumbled privately to one another for years have something concrete to which they can point. Anyone who teaches in an American university has heard similar inanities from students and colleagues in comparative literature or cultural studies. Sokal and Bricmont's book should have an impact at least on the next generation of students.

II.

Although Sokal and Bricmont focus on the abuse and the misrepresentation of science by a dozen French intellectuals, and on the cognitive relativism of postmodern theory, their book broaches a much larger topic—the uneasy place of science and the understanding of scientific rationality in contemporary culture.

The technological consequences of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology permeate our lives, and everyone who has been around for a few decades has witnessed the most spectacular developments. That alone would give science enormous prestige; but it also reinforces the purely intellectual aura of science as a domain of understanding that takes us far beyond common sense, by methods that are often far more reliable than common sense. The problem is that it is not easy for those without scientific training to acquire a decent grasp of this kind of understanding, as opposed to an awareness of its consequences and an ability to parrot some of its terminology. One can be infatuated with the idea of theory without understanding what a theory is.

To have a theory, it is not enough to throw around a set of abstract terms or to classify things under different labels. Whether it is true or false, a theory has to include some general principles by which fresh consequences can be inferred from particular facts—consequences not already implied by the initial description of those facts. The most familiar theories embody causal principles that enable us to infer from present observation what will happen or what has already happened, but there are other kinds of theories—mathematical, linguistic, or ethical theories, for example—that describe noncausal systematic relations. A successful theory increases one's cognitive power over its domain, one's power to understand why the particular facts are as they are, and to discover new facts by inference from others that one can observe directly. Most important of all, it provides an understanding of the unifying reality that underlies observed diversity.

You do not have to understand quantum mechanics to appreciate the nature of science. Anyone who has taken introductory chemistry and is familiar with the periodic table of the elements has some idea of how powerful a theory can be—what an extraordinary wealth of specific consequences can be derived from a limited number of precise but general principles. And understanding classical chemistry requires only a basic spatial imagination and simple mathematics, nothing counterintuitive. Yet it should be clear that not everything in the world is governed by general principles sufficiently precise and substantive to be embodied in a theory. Theories in the social sciences are possible which depend on principles, even if they are only probabilistic, that apply to large numbers of people; but to employ theoretical-sounding jargon in talking about literature or art has about as much effect as putting on a lab coat, and in most cases the same is true for history.

Unfortunately, the lack of familiarity with real scientific theories sometimes results in the imitation of their outward forms together with the denigration of their claim to provide a specially powerful source of objective knowledge about the world. This defensive iconoclasm has received crucial support from a radical position in the history and the philosophy of science, whose authority is regularly invoked by writers outside those fields: the epistemological relativism or even the anarchism found in the writings of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend.

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As Sokal and Bricmont explain, Kuhn and Feyerabend were writing in the context of an ongoing dispute over the relation of scientific theories to empirical evidence. The logical positivists tried to interpret scientific propositions so that they would be entailed by the evidence of experience. Karl Popper denied that this was possible, but held that scientific propositions, if they were to have empirical content, had to be such that at least their falsehood could be entailed by the evidence of experience. Yet neither of these direct logical relations appears to hold, because the evidentiary relation pro or con between any experience and any theoretical claim always involves auxiliary hypotheses—things apart from the proposition and the evidence themselves that are being assumed true or false. There is nothing wrong with relying on many assumptions in the ordinary case, but it is always logically possible that some of them may be false, and sometimes that conclusion is forced on us with regard to an assumption that had seemed obvious. When that happens with a truly fundamental aspect of our world view, we speak of a scientific revolution.

So far, none of this implies that scientific reasoning is not objective, or that it cannot yield knowledge of reality. All it means is that a scientific inference from evidence to the truth or the falsity of any proposition involves in some degree our whole system of beliefs and experience; and that the method is not logical deduction alone, but a weighing of which elements of the system it is most reasonable to retain and which to abandon when an inconsistency among them appears. In normal inquiry, this is usually easy to determine; but at the cutting edge it is often difficult, and a clear answer may have to await the experimental production of further evidence, or the construction of new theoretical hypotheses.

This means that most of our beliefs at any time must in some degree be regarded as provisional, since they may be replaced when a different balance of reasons is generated by new experience or theoretical ingenuity. It also means that an eternal set of rules of scientific method cannot be laid down in advance. But it does *not* mean that it cannot be true that a certain theory is the most reasonable to accept given the evidence available at a particular time, and it does *not* mean that the theory cannot be objectively true, however provisionally we may hold it. Truth is not the same as certainty, or universal acceptance.

Another point sometimes made against the claim of scientific objectivity is that experience is always "theory-laden," as if that meant that any experience which seemed to contradict a theory could be reinterpreted in terms of it, so that nothing could ever rationally require us to accept or to reject a theory. As Sokal and Bricmont point out, however, nothing of the kind follows.

Suppose I have the theory that a diet of hot fudge sundaes will enable me to lose a pound a day. If I eat only hot fudge sundaes and weigh myself every morning, my interpretation of the numbers on the scale is certainly dependent on a theory of mechanics that explains how the scale will respond when objects of different weights are placed on it. But it is not dependent on my dietary theories. If I concluded from the fact that the numbers keep getting higher that my intake of ice cream must be altering the laws of mechanics in my bathroom, it would be philosophical idiocy to defend the inference by appealing to Quine's dictum that all our statements about the external world face the tribunal of experience as a corporate body, rather than one by one. Certain revisions in response to the evidence are reasonable; others are pathological.

Much of what Kuhn says about great theoretical shifts, and the inertial role of long-established scientific paradigms and their cultural entrenchment in resisting recalcitrant evidence until it becomes overwhelming, is entirely reasonable, but it is also entirely compatible with the conception of science as seeking, and sometimes finding, objective truth about the world. What has made him a relativist hero is the addition of provocative remarks to the effect that Newton and Einstein, or Ptolemy and Galileo, live in "different worlds," that the paradigms of different scientific periods are "incommensurable," and that it is a mistake to think of the progress of science over time as bringing us closer to the truth about how the world really is.

Feyerabend is more consistently outrageous than Kuhn, deriding the privileged position of modern science as a way of understanding the world. "All methodologies have their limitations," he says in *Against Method*, "and the only 'rule' that survives is 'anything goes.'" As Sokal and Bricmont point out, the first clause of this sentence may be true, but it does not in any way support the second. I was a colleague of Feyerabend's at Berkeley in the 1960s, and once it fell to the two of us to grade the German exam for the graduate students in philosophy. About twenty of them took it, and their papers were numbered to preserve anonymity. We discovered that the

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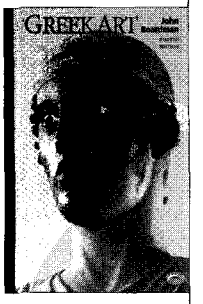

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department secretary who assigned the numbers had considerately left out the number thirteen, and Feyerabend was appalled and outraged by this display of rank superstition. But his views developed; and both he and Kuhn have a lot to answer for.

Both of them are repeatedly cited in support of the claim that everything, including the physical world, is a social construct existing only from the perspective of this or that cognitive practice, that there is no truth but only conformity or nonconformity to the discourse of this or that community, and that the adoption of scientific theories is to be explained sociologically rather than by the probative weight of reasoning from the experimental evidence. Scientists do not believe this, but many nonscientists now do. Thus Sokal and Bricmont tell us that the sociologist of science Bruno Latour recently challenged as anachronistic the report of French scientists who examined the mummy of Ramses II that the pharaoh had died of tuberculosis, because the tuberculosis bacillus came into existence only when Robert Koch discovered it in 1882.

I do not think that this is just a case of malign influence from bad philosophy. The radical relativism found in Kuhn and Feyerabend fell on fertile ground. The postmodernist doctrine that there is nothing outside the text, no world to which it is tied down, seems plausible to the consumers of postmodernist writings because it is so often true of those writings, where language is simply allowed to take off on its own. Those who have no objective standards themselves find it easy to deny them to others.

III.

As Sokal and Bricmont point out, the denial of objective truth on the ground that all systems of belief are determined by social forces is self-refuting if we take it seriously, since it appeals to a sociological or historical claim that would not establish the conclusion unless it were objectively correct. Moreover, it promotes one discipline, such as sociology or history, over the others whose objectivity it purports to debunk, such as physics and mathematics. Given that many propositions in the latter fields are much better established than the theories of social determination by which their objectivity is being challenged, this is like using a ouija board to decide whether your car needs new brake linings.

Relativism is kept alive by a simple fallacy, repeated again and again: the idea that if something is a form of discourse, the only standard to which it can answer is conformity to the practices of a linguistic community, and that any evaluation of its content or its justification must somehow be reduced to that. This is to ignore the differences between types of discourse, which can be understood only by studying them from inside. There are certainly domains, such as etiquette or spelling, where what is correct is completely determined by the practices of a particular community. Yet empirical knowledge, including science, is not like this. Where agreement exists, it is produced by evidence and reasoning, and not vice versa. The constantly evolving practices of those engaged in scientific research aim beyond themselves at a correct account of the world, and are not logically guaranteed to achieve it. Their recognition of their own fallibility shows that the resulting claims have objective content.

Sokal and Bricmont argue that the methods of reasoning in the natural sciences are essentially the same as those used in ordinary inquiries such as a criminal investigation. In that instance, we are presented with various pieces of evidence, we use lots of assumptions about physical causation, spatial and temporal order, basic human psychology, and the functioning of social institutions, and we try to see how well these fit together with alternative hypotheses about who committed the murder. The data and the background assumptions do not entail an answer, but they often make one answer more reasonable than others. Indeed, they may establish it, as we say, "beyond a reasonable doubt."

That is precisely what scientists strive for. While reasonable indubitability is not the position of theories at the cutting edge of knowledge, many scientific results achieve it over time through massive and repeated confirmation, together with the disconfirmation of alternatives. Even when the principles of classical chemistry are explained at a deeper level by quantum theory, they remain indispensably in place as part of our understanding of the world.

And yet there is something else about the science produced over the past century that makes it more than a vast extension of the employment of common-sense rationality. The fact is that contemporary scientific theories describing the invisible physical reality underlying appearances no longer represent a world that can be intuitively grasped, even in rough outline, by the normal human imagination. Newtonian mechanics, the atomic theory of matter, and even the basic principles of electricity and magnetism can be roughly visualized by ordinary people. Quantum theory and the theory of relativity cannot be so visualized, because they introduce concepts of space, time, and the relation between observed and unobserved states of affairs that diverge radically from the intuitive concepts that we all use in thinking about our surroundings.

Scientific progress has accustomed us to the idea that the world has properties very different from those presented to our unaided senses, but classical theories can still be understood through models that are based on what we can see and touch. Everyone understands what it is for something to be composed of parts, and there is no difficulty in extending this idea to parts that are too minute to be seen but are inferable from other evidence, such as that of the chemical reactions between different types of substances. We can perceive the action of gravity and magnetic attraction, and electric currents can be roughly imagined by analogy with the flow of liquids. Yet the world of Einstein's special theory of relativity, in which the interval between two widely separated events cannot be uniquely specified in terms of a spatial distance and a temporal distance, is not one that can be intuitively grasped, even roughly, by a layman.

Our natural idea, an idea entirely suitable for the scale of ordinary experience, that things happen in a unique three-dimensional space and along a unique one-dimensional time order, is so deep a feature of our intuitive conception of the world that it is very hard to make the transition, required by relativity theory, to seeing this as just the way things appear from the point of view of a particular frame of reference. To account for the different spatio-temporal relations that the same events appear to have from different frames of reference in uniform motion relative to one another, it is necessary to postulate a reality of a different kind, relativistic space-time, which can be precisely mathematically described but not really imagined.

Special relativity is not a theory whose interpretation is contested. It reveals an objective reality very different from the way the world appears, but one with clear and definite properties. Quantum theory, by contrast, though it is extremely successful in predicting the observable facts—deriving from physics the phenomena described by classical chemistry, for example—seems to present conceptual problems even to the physicists who work with it, problems about how to conceive the underlying reality that the theory describes, which is so different from the observed reality that it explains.

If one tries to use ordinary physical

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imagination to grasp the reality underlying the observations, the result always contradicts the observations. It is impossible to convey the problem without discussing the theory, but one gets a flavor of the difficulty from the usual gloss that in quantum mechanics, we seem forced to think of the basic facts as indeterminate among mutually incompatible observable states—as if a 50 percent chance of rain, for example, could be the most accurate description of yesterday's weather.

Physics continues to develop, of course; but these two theories have taken us to a conception of the real character of the world that can be grasped only through mathematical formulations and not even roughly by the ordinary imagination. As a result, scientific journalism often reads like mumbo jumbo. Not only does this prevent the assimilation of modern physics into the general educated understanding of the world, it also leads to grotesque misuse of reference to these theories by those who think of them as a kind of magic.

Thus quantum theory, via the Heisenberg indeterminacy principle, and to a lesser extent relativity, are often invoked to show that today even science has had to abandon the idea of an objective, mind-independent reality. Yet neither theory has this significance, however strange may be the reality that they describe and its interaction with observers. And this alienation will only increase if, as seems likely, science penetrates to less and less intuitively imaginable accounts of the reality that lies behind the familiar manifest world, accounts that rely more and more on mathematics that only specialists can learn.

IV.

Sokal and Bricmont are as much concerned with the general rise of irrationalism and relativism as with the abuse of science, and one of their motives is political. Sokal says that what motivated him to produce his parody was a belief that the infestation of the academic left in America with postmodernist relativism badly weakened their position as critics of the established order. To challenge widely accepted practices, it is not enough to say there is no objective truth, and then present an alternative point of view.

Sokal in particular emphasizes that he is an Old Leftist, and that he taught math in Nicaragua during the Sandinista government. Clearly he does not want to be confused with Allan Bloom. As Sokal and Bricmont rightly observe, there is no logical connection between any abstract theory of metaphysics or epistemology and any particular political position. Objectivity with regard to the facts ought to be regarded as essential for any view, left, right, or center, that presents itself as an account of how societies should be organized. Objectivity is implied by every claim that the justification for one system is better than the justification for another, because justification always involves, in addition to values that may be contested, appeals to the facts that reveal how well a particular system will serve those values. Objectivity should be valued by anyone whose policies are not supported by lies.

The embrace of relativism by many leftist intellectuals in the United States, while it may not be politically very important, is a terrible admission of failure, and an excuse for not answering the claims of their political opponents. The subordination of the intellect to partisan loyalty is found across the political spectrum, but usually it takes the form of a blind insistence on the objective truth of certain supporting facts and a refusal to consider evidence to the contrary. So what explains the shift, at least by a certain slice of the intellectual left, to this new form of obfuscation?

Sokal and Bricmont attribute it partly to despair brought on by the course of history:

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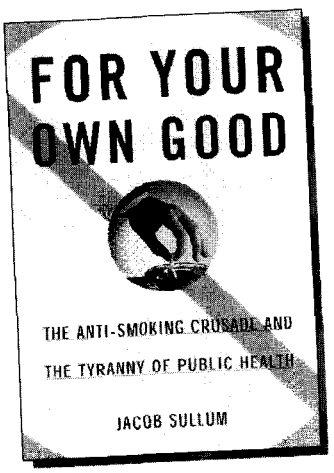

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> The communist regimes have collapsed; the social-democratic parties, where they remain in power, apply watered-down neoliberal policies; and the Third World movements that led their countries to independence have, in most cases, abandoned any attempt at autonomous development. In short, the harshest form of "free market" capitalism seems to have become the implacable reality for the foreseeable future. Never before have the ideals of justice and equality seemed so utopian.

This is a disturbing bit of rhetoric. Anyone whose hopes were dashed by the collapse of communism had a very feeble grip on reality or a very distasteful set of values, and it is simply playing to the galleries to say that we are now all doomed to the harshest form of free market capitalism. A return to old-fashioned standards of objectivity of the kind that this book favors would require the abandonment of a lot of left-wing cant, and that is not the same as abandoning the ideals of justice and equality.

Perhaps Sokal and Bricmont are right, and the appeal of relativism comes when one gives up the will to win, and settles for the license to keep saying what one has always said, this time without fear of contradiction. But I think that there is a more direct link between postmodernism and the traditional ideas of the left. The explanation of all ostensibly rational forms of thought in terms of social influences is a generalization of the old Marxist idea of ideology, by which moral principles were all debunked as rationalizations of class interest. The new relativists, with Nietzschean extravagance, have merely extended their exposure of the hollowness of pretensions to objectivity to science and everything else. Like its narrower predecessor, this form of analysis sees "objectivity" as a mask for the exercise of power, and so provides a natural vehicle for the expression of class hatred.

Postmodernism's specifically academic appeal comes from its being another in the sequence of all-purpose "unmasking" strategies that offer a way to criticize the intellectual efforts of others not by engaging with them on the ground, but by diagnosing them from a superior vantage point and charging them with inadequate self-awareness. Logical positivism and Marxism were used by academics in this way, and postmodernist relativism is a natural successor in the role. It may now be on the way out, but I suspect there will continue to be a market in the huge American academy for a quick fix of some kind. If it is not social constructionism, it will be something else—Darwinian explanations of practically everything, perhaps.

THOMAS NAGEL's most recent book is *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press).

The Sentimentalist

BY JAMES WOOD

I Married a Communist by Philip Roth

(Houghton Mifflin, 323 pp., $26)

Sentimentality is Philip Roth's blackmailer; every year he comes looking for victory, and every year Roth has managed to repel him with the daylight of skepticism. Until now, alas. Sentimentality has again made its demands, and Roth has paid up in his latest novel, with lax charity.

The sentimentality is not immediately apparent. This story of Ira Ringold, a big, oafish, heroic Communist from Newark who is brought down by the witch-hunts of the 1950s, is told in Roth's characteristic mode, in boiling monologues and rushing advocacy—a courtroom of impatience. The language, again characteristic of the recent books, has Roth's toughened plainness. But where Roth's monologues once loitered beautifully and then progressed on the toes of argument, they now stamp on argument itself, with an inflexible and rather boring primitivism. And in this book, underneath Roth's burnt wit, is a heart like a soft pudding.

Sentimentality, and a specifically Jewish sentimentality, garnished Roth's output from the start. Generally, the reader was willing to extend to Roth a little free credit. *Goodbye, Columbus*, his first book, is moving *and* sentimental, and it can be both because the book is about nostalgia, which is a movingly sentimental feeling. In that novella, at the end of the Patimkin wedding, Ben Patimkin's less successful half-brother Leo gives a speech not unlike Marlon Brando's "I coulda been a contender" whine in *On the Waterfront*. Leo sells lightbulbs on the road, and he tells young Neil that if he could, he'd sell up and pack it in tomorrow:

> That's right, Leo A. Patimkin, one semester accounting, City College nights, will sell equipment, territory, good name. I'll buy two inches in the *Times*. The territory is from here to everywhere. I go where I want, my own boss, no one tells me what to do.... What good is it to be smart unless you're in on the ground floor! I got more brains in my pinky than Ben got in his whole *head*. Why is it he's on top and I'm on the bottom! *Why*! Believe me, if you're born lucky, you're lucky!

He finishes by telling Neil: "You'll go far.... You're a smart boy, you'll play it safe. Don't louse things up."

Roth, only twenty-six, had found his voice: here are the vaudeville roll, the leaning italics, the beseeching repetition that are now so familiar. If we stifle our suspicion that no one talks like this in life, that this strange fluency in failure is characteristic not of people but only of actors in the movies, we do so because it is the end of a wedding, and Leo has been drinking, and characters need not always be real. If Roth is a little vulgar here, he is also satirizing a vulgar world, where emotions are up for sale and people use phrases like "don't louse things up." So we allow Leo his oil of feeling.

But the new novel is written in this manner throughout. It does not satirize vulgar sentiment; it reveres it, rather as *On the Waterfront* does. *I Married a Communist* reads as if it was written by Leo Patimkin.

In fact, it is Nathan Zuckerman, the narrator of many of Roth's novels, who introduces us to the Ringold brothers. Murray Ringold taught English to Nathan at his high school in Newark in the late 1940s, and was a great influence on him. Murray was a decent left-winger but not a Communist, unlike his brother Ira, who was a huge, simple, uneducated ideologue. For several years, Ira was Nathan's mentor, until Nathan left New Jersey for the University of Chicago. As a young man, Nathan had idolized Ira Ringold. One evening in 1997, Nathan meets Murray Ringold, now an energetic ninety-year-old. Murray tells Nathan Ira's troubled life story, and this biography, partly narrated by Nathan and partly by Murray, is the shank of Roth's novel.

Unlike Murray, who was studious, Ira left school early, and did a number of lowly manual jobs, including working in a zinc mine. He is very tall (six foot six),

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fearless, stubborn, not clever, but dogmatic: an ideological mule. In the army, an autodidact named Johnny O'Day leads Ira to the drinking-bowl of Communist thought, and from this moment Ira follows the Party line. He is outraged by American indifference to the plight of the working man, and is convinced that President Truman wants to start World War III with the Russians, and is a calumniator of Churchill, whom he despises as a Cold War hysteric and a liverish imperialist. Nathan tells us how alluring, as a boy, he found this hotheaded sermonizer:

> Listening to Murray, I couldn't help but be overtaken by memories of being with Ira, memories I didn't even know I continued to have, memories of how I used to gorge myself on his words and on his adult convictions, solid memories of the two of us walking in Weequahic Park and his telling me about the impoverished kids he'd seen in Iran....

For several years, all goes well with Ira. He squeezes an unexpected career from his noisy politics, becoming a celebrated actor for a left-wing radio show. He marries the beautiful actress Eve Frame, and although the couple live glamorously in Manhattan, Ira loses none of his blunt political passion. But Ira cannot live with Eve's daughter from an earlier marriage, the fat and grasping Sylphid. The daughter comes between Ira and Eve, as does Eve's anti-Semitism (despite Eve's own Jewish origins). Eventually the marriage disintegrates, and Ira is blacklisted from radio for Communist activities. Then he is denounced by Eve in a salacious book with the title *I Married a Communist.* (For his Newark scenes, Roth graciously acknowledges his debt to *Newark's Little Italy: The Vanished First Ward* by Michael Immerso, but it is hard not to feel the shadow on his story also of his marriage to Claire Bloom, another actress with a duosyllabic name who "exposed" her husband in an autobiographical book that denounced, among other things, his problem with her daughter.)

Roth's novel wants to subsist on the alms of feeling rather than on the labor of evocation. The story is all spokes; it has no center, because Ira, who is supposed to be its center, barely exists. He leaks quiddity at every turn. He is more like a Soviet poster of a working hero than the ridged and recessed entity that fiction demands. This is partly because Nathan, for the first two hundred pages of the book, simply reports to us his own starstruck reverence; and partly because the Stakhanov of Newark is just not interesting.

Indeed, it is unclear why Roth, who does not apparently possess a sensitive or original political imagination, is so attracted to the McCarthy era. Ira Ringold is an entirely familiar historical creation. Roth has hardly smoked him out of the archives; Ira has rather been peeled off the front pages of the newspapers of the 1950s. His political harangues have no subtlety or surprise, and yet he exists only for these lectures. His anger is wearying, his appeal mystifying. "I was so goddamn angry, see? Y'understand? I wanted to tell people that this was *wrong*," he tells Nathan. And later in the book, at a dinner party, Ira returns to his anger:

> Look, I get angry.... I hope to my dying day I *stay* angry. I get in trouble because I get angry. I get in trouble because I won't shut up. I get very angry with my darling country when Mr. Truman tells people, and they believe him, that Communism is the big problem in this country. Not the racism. Not the inequities. That's not the problem. The Communists are the problem. The forty thousand or sixty thousand or a hundred thousand Communists. They're going to overthrow the government of a hundred and fifty million people. Don't insult my intelligence. I'll tell you what's going to overthrow the whole goddamn place—the way we treat the colored people. The way we treat the working people. It's not going to be the Communists who overthrow this country. This country is going to overthrow itself by treating people like animals!

This is insufferable, and so perhaps Roth wants us to feel it—except that one suspects Roth of finding Ira more interestingly insufferable than he in fact is. The verisimilitude of such a passage is only a surface verisimilitude. And it seems a strange squandering of a novel to devote it to a lesson in the boring insufferability of its hero, or even a lesson about how ideology flattens character. Indeed, it cannot be done without flattening the novel; it is like using an orchestra to prove that the oboist was off-key.

The character is the novel's aorta. Henry James rightly noted that the blankness of Frédéric, the young hero of *Sentimental Education,* Flaubert's political novel, almost kills the book, and certainly produces "an empty epic." Ira does indeed infect the novel with his wild sentimentalities. This is not only because Roth devotes so much space to him, but also because everyone else sounds like Ira. This is a novel without internal borders; everyone partakes of everyone else's reality, rather as only a few Muslim first names are universally shared.

Each of Roth's characters sounds the same as the next. Though Murray is not tough like Ira, Nathan insists on seeing them in the same way, sentimentally: "two shirtless brothers well over six feet tall, two big, natural men exuding the sort of forceful, intelligent manliness to which I aspired. Men who could talk about baseball and boxing talking about books." Nathan, although he is nothing like Ira, speaks to us in Ira's toughened simplicities. When Ira shows weakness, Nathan informs us that he was worried that "he'd never find the way back to being the brave, angry hero I adored." Even Nathan's inner life sounds like a political rally. At the University of Chicago, he has a brief crisis of indecision. Should he continue his studies with his teacher, Leo Glucksman, or join Johnny O'Day and the Party? But Nathan only shouts at his own soul:

> I thought, Why isn't this reachable? Do it the way you got on that bus and went downtown and attended the Wallace rally. Is your life yours or is it theirs? Have you the

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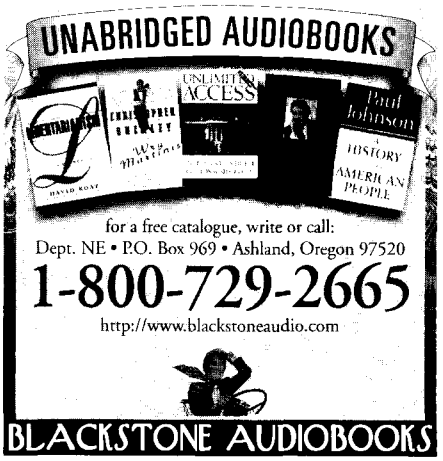

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courage of your convictions or haven't you? Is this America the kind of America you want to live in or do you intend to go out and revolutionize it? Or are you, like every other "idealistic" college student you know, another selfish, privileged, self-involved hypocrite? What are you afraid of—the hardship, the opprobrium, the danger, or O'Day himself? What are you afraid of if *not* your softness? Don't look to your parents to get you out of this. Don't call home and ask permission to join the Communist Party. Pack your clothes and your books and get back down there and do it!

Again, Roth's argument might be that we must attend to how deformed and how coarse has become the quality of Nathan's ratiocination, thanks to Ira's influence. But I do not think that this is Roth's point. And besides, it is not necessary in a novel to enact every impoverishment that you wish to describe. The only effect is the impoverishment of the novel itself.

Nathan sounds like Ira; and Murray sounds like Ira, too; and all of them sound like Leo Patimkin. Murray, the ninety-year-old high school teacher, speaks, most implausibly, a tough-guy vernacular: "And she's a little pleasure factory. The kid has her hand on her pussy all the time." Or: "Lorraine got a bang out of this broad." Or: "Then I got a scholarship to the University of Newark. I was on my way. But Ira was still a kid. A tough kid. A crude kid. Full of mistrust." Meanwhile, Nathan's teacher at the University of Chicago, though he opposes all forms of politics, sounds like Ira, delivering long rants about the necessary uselessness of art, and telling Nathan: "Get your lovable shit out of this office, please." And O'Day, though he is supposed to be very different from Ira and Murray, sounds like them too. When he finally he denounces Ira, it is because Ira was "seduced by fame and money and wealth and power. And pussy, fancy Hollywood pussy."

This novel persistently sentimentalizes anger. Everyone is angry in the novel; the novel is a veritable one-party statelet of anger; it is scored for anger. Murray explains Ira's anger as one of America's gifts to the Jews. Like everyone else in this novel, he soliloquizes, repetitively, in a kind of sullen stammer:

> One of the privileges of being American and Jewish was that you could be angry in the world in Ira's way, aggressive about your beliefs and leaving no insult unavenged. You didn't have to shrug and resign yourself. You didn't have to muffle anything.... Just get out in the open and argue your point. That's one of the biggest things that America gave to the Jews—gave them their anger. Especially our generation, Ira's and mine. Especially after the war. The America we came home to offered us a place to really get pissed off, without the Jewish governor on. Angry Jewish guys in Hollywood. Angry Jewish guys in the garment business. The lawyers, the angry Jewish guys in the courtroom. Everywhere. In the bakery line. At the ballpark. On the ball field.

Roth has visited this obsession before, but never so baldly. Several of his earlier novels breathe a complacency at the idea of Jewish inappropriateness. In *My Life as a Man*, Peter Tarnopol mocks the pallid WASP gentilities of his literary education in the 1950s: "The seven Christian critics in the seminar would hardly dare to speak when the three dark Jews ... got shouting and gesticulating at one another over *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." *Sabbath's Theater* is the large exception, a novel in which anger is never bolstering, in which it is genuinely, frighteningly corrosive of the self.

In *I Married a Communist*, however, uncombed anger is idolized by both Nathan and the novel, for the first two hundred pages. Ira's unthinking, manly decency, his furious support for the underdog, is admired. A rhetoric of tough-guy street talk, shared by all of the characters, is used to incarnate this sentimentality. When Ira begins to crack, after the failure of his marriage and his blacklisting, and is committed to a mental hospital, his pain is sentimentalized by Murray (and by the novel) as merely a kind of softened anger: "You don't realize how much plain old misery can be backed up inside a titanically defiant person who's been taking on the world and battling his own nature his whole life."

Yet the high prestige afforded to anger in Roth's book is only a mark of a larger sentimentality: the unwillingness to follow character beyond the book's plunging valleys of drama. In this book, character is always driven into drama in order to be tested by it; character *is* drama here, which is why anger is the novel's usual characterological mode, for anger is just the hypostasis of drama, the digest of drama. Ira exists only in order to stumble into drama: when a youth, he kills someone; in the army, he is beaten for being a leftist "Negro-lover"; in marriage, he tears and fights with his wife and daughter; in politics, he offends and challenges. He is involved in a kind of picaresque of anger, rushing from one fight to another. The problem is that he is no *picaro*. Quite the opposite, he is monotony's slave. He is enduring a picaresque while standing still in the same place. And so, alas, are we.

Roth's sentimentality is really a version of melodrama. His characters are raucously simple, and they can express themselves only through a melodrama that is both angry and lachrymose. There is no obvious need for this state of arrest. Roth's unwillingness to rub any gray into his characters, his refusal to host the very idea of the meridian, his determination to deal only in the fighting hides of his creations and never to illuminate their inwardness—this is what chases the novel off complexity.

It is fair to remark that Roth does attempt to complicate Nathan's portrayal of Ira, and hence our idea of Ira, about two-thirds of the way through the book. Having praised Ira's golden qualities, Nathan begins to admit that, as he moved away to Chicago, he began to find Ira bullying and monochrome and unintelligent. Meanwhile, we learn that Ira, when he was sixteen, murdered an old enemy by stoving in his head with a shovel. And as the novel cools on Ira, so his political and marital life explodes. Enraged by Eve's book, he can think only of revenge: he wants to kill his wife and daughter, and is blocked from doing so only by Murray, who confiscates his weapons.

But this is too little, too late. First, the complication is itself melodramatic, and therefore not really a complication. To turn Ira from Nathan's muscular Soviet hero into a murdering imbecile is only a simplifying complication. Second, this complication of our idea of Ira, such as it is, is only a complication of politics, not of character. Roth appears to want to remind us of the costs of ideological commitment; and also to remind us that most ideologues are contradictory, and therefore not ideologues, for all the outward signs. After all, Ira, the Communist radio star, is ruined as much by his very bourgeois marriage to the rich, conservative, anti-Semitic Eve as by his actual politics. But this, again, is a political point. It does not deepen our sense of Ira's spirit, it only deepens our sense of his plight. If anything, this political complication serves only to simplify Ira as a character, for it merely increases Ira's one dependable trait: he gets angrier and angrier (and sadder and sadder, sadness being merely anger when it is asleep).

It is Johnny O'Day who remains ideologically pure. He is not harpooned by contradictions. Having passed on the faith to Ira, he continues to live monkishly, in claustral commitment to the Party. Yet in Roth's depiction of O'Day, the novel's political failures are most clear. The only long description of O'Day in the novel occurs when Nathan decides to meet O'Day in Chicago. The

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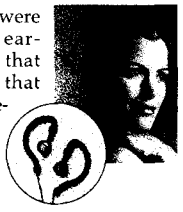

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passage seems, at first sight, admirably focused:

> O'Day's appearance should have been no surprise. Ira had described him exactly as he still was, a man constructed like a heron: a lean, taut, blade-faced six-footer with close-cut gray hair, eyes that also appeared to have turned gray, a sharp, large knife of a nose.... But what Ira hadn't described was how zealotry had bestowed the look of a body that had a man locked up inside serving the severe sentence that was his life. It was the look of a being who has no choice. His story has been made up beforehand. He has no choice about anything.... It isn't just the physique that is a filament of steel, enviably narrow; the ideology, too, is tool-like and contoured like the edgewise silhouette of the heron's fuselage.

But this will not do, and it marks Roth's failure as a novelist of politics. For if Ira's political contradictions are over-simplified, then O'Day's purism has been over-simplified, too. Why should a purist have the body of a heron and not the body of a hippo? O'Day might as easily be fat as blade-like. Are purists always narrow-faced? A comparison can be made with the always startling characters in Conrad's great political novels, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent.* In Conrad, a facile connection between ideology and physique is often resisted, so that human contradiction—rather than political contradiction—might be allowed to enter.

Roth writes that O'Day looks like a man who "has no choice." But this is because Roth himself has given O'Day no choice; he has given him no flexible dimension of being. He has condemned his physique and his manner to match his thin ideology. In Conrad's grotesquely insinuating anarchists and spies, by contrast, in his shabby writers, his dowagers, widows, torturers, and plump failures, we are always offered the prospect of characters who have had choices, and who have made interestingly unpleasant ones.

Neither O'Day nor Ira Ringold are thought of as having a choice by Roth. O'Day is as mean as a whippet, and looks like one; and Ira is a stupid giant, and looks like one. Yet it is not only politically unwise of Roth to suggest that O'Day (and Ira) is "a being who has no choice"; it is a kind of dereliction as a novelist. For if one is to be a political novelist, it is all the more important that one fight the little determinism of politics with the huge freedom of fictional character.

At its best, Roth's fiction has a narrow power unlike anyone else's, the agitated density of a crowded prison. All the weaknesses of this novel, for instance, were magnificently inverted in *Sabbath's Theater*: the same anger, the same tendency toward sentimentality, the same dunning monologues, the same reliance on drama as the fire of character. Yet that novel was a great book, and this one is not. The difference lies, partly, in the philosophical seriousness of *Sabbath's Theater,* and in the superior intelligence of its hero, Mickey Sabbath. That novel had a genuinely nihilistic project, which was the serious quest to overturn life, to poison its healthiness. This was something quite new and strange in Roth's work, a slightly deranged urgency. But the politics of *I Married a Communist* is not at all strange (it is entirely familiar), and it does not seem very urgent to Roth. It seems a diversion.

When Roth is not writing well, his narrowness can seem primitive, and may produce a novel which is only the album

Houston, 6 P.M.

Europe already sleeps beneath a coarse plaid of borders
and ancient hatreds: France nestled
up to Germany, Bosnia in Serbia's arms,
lonely Sicily in azure seas.

It's early evening here, the lamp is lit
and the dark sun swiftly fades.
I'm alone, I read a little, think a little,
listen to a little music.

I'm where there's friendship,
but no friends, where enchantment
grows without magic,
where the dead laugh.

I'm alone because Europe is sleeping. My love
sleeps in a tall house on the outskirts of Paris.
In Krakow and Paris my friends
wade in the same river of oblivion.

I read and think; in one poem
I found the phrase "There are blows so terrible ...
Don't ask!" I don't. A helicopter
breaks the evening quiet.

Poetry calls us to a higher life,
but what's low is just as eloquent,
more plangent than Indo-European,
stronger than my books and records.

There are no nightingales or blackbirds here
with their sad, sweet cantilenas,
only the mockingbird who imitates
and mimics every living voice.

Poetry summons us to life, to courage
in the face of the growing shadow.
Can you gaze calmly at the Earth
like the perfect astronaut?

Out of harmless indolence, the Greece of books,
and the Jerusalem of memory there suddenly appears
the island of a poem, unpeopled;
some new Cook will discover it one day.

Europe is already sleeping. Night's animals,
mournful and rapacious,
move in for the kill.
Soon America will be sleeping, too.

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI
—translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh

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of his obsessions, and which seems to have little of the novelistic about it. In the end, it is not a problem for *Sentimental Education* that Frédéric is a blank, because Flaubert's descriptions of political and social gatherings, his canvas of the barricades of 1848, is so rich. But Roth is not that kind of novelist. Indeed, he has become, in recent books, a very essayistic writer; no longer showing but loudly telling. In some respects, he has become a philosophical novelist. In order to be a philosophical novelist, however, one must be philosophical. *I Married a Communist* is only an essay about politics, and a rather conventional one. •

White Noise

By Nathan Glazer

Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race by Matthew Frye Jacobson

(Harvard University Press, 338 pp., $29.95)

Matthew Frye Jacobson begins with what is well-known to students of American ethnicity and race: that many groups once considered separate "races" are no longer considered such today. Their classification, in the popular mind, in judicial decisions, in politics, has changed over time. In the popular press in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and among political leaders and intellectuals, the various European immigrant ethnic groups, as we now think of them, were deemed to be of different "race," and in particular different from the original settlers, primarily from England. (In cartoons, reproduced in this book, they were portrayed as dark-skinned.) But we have in time sharply restricted the use of the term "race," and in so doing we have gathered many who were once only doubtfully of the same race under the one umbrella of "whiteness." African Americans remain as a separate race, and are now joined in the race category by the peoples of Eastern and Southern Asia, all denoted as "races" in the census. The various groups of Hispanics are given an ambiguous quasi-racial identity in the census, and in the American mind.

This process has been well-known for some time. Jacobson tells of a sociologist studying an industrial town in Pennsylvania in 1910 who "broke the community down along the 'racial' lines of 'Slav, English-speaking European, native white, and colored.'" He refers us to Mencken, who "casually alluded to the volume of literature crossing his desk by 'Negro and other non-Nordic races,' by which ... he meant people like John Fante and Louis Adamic." And in a passage from Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*—often referred to subsequently in the book—Jacobson reports a conversation between a Jewish man and a non-Jewish woman in which she refers to a "racial" difference between Jews and non-Jews, and he objects forcefully to the notion that they are different in race: "But I am Caucasian, kiddo."

The issue for Jacobson is not simply a matter of nomenclature, or getting the names right in accordance with the formal disciplines that study group differences and the proper definition of words that denote the varying degrees of difference. Nor can the change in usage be attributed to the impact of Nazism upon the career of the word "race," so that we carefully avoid it except in reference to the largest and most visible divisions of mankind, where we seem to be unable to do without it. (Many today argue that we should do without it.) Jacobson is concerned, rather, with the meaning of this change of classification, and its meaning is, for him, large indeed.

Race, we are often told today, and Jacobson agrees, is a category that is "constructed," or to use a word in the title of his first chapter, "fabricated." Moreover, it is constructed and fabricated for a purpose. The purpose is to exclude some and to include others:

> Two sorts of anachronism have resulted from the general failure to recover the historical processes of racial mutability. First, historians have most often cast the history of nineteenth-century immigration in the logic of twentieth-century "ethnic" groups—"race" did not really *mean* "race" back then, in other words.... Tacitly assuming that race did not mean "race"—that Hebrews, ... Iberics, or Teutons were *really* Caucasians—is worse than merely

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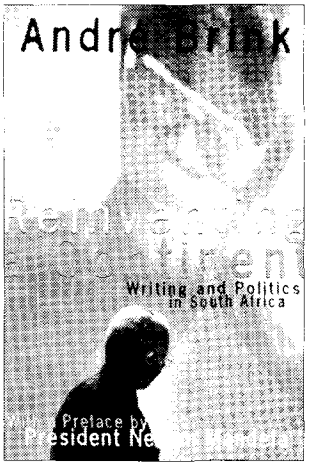
Reinventing a Continent
essays by André Brink



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> underestimating the ideological power of racialism: it is surrendering to that power. To miss the fluidity of race itself in this process of becoming Caucasian is to reify a monolithic whiteness, and ... to cordon that whiteness off from other racial groupings along lines that are silently presumed to be more genuine. Failure properly to theorize the transmutation of white races into Caucasians has left open the way for a second kind of anachronism: seizing upon their forebears' status as racial Others, writers like Michael Novak and Michael Lerner now disavow any participation in twentieth-century white privilege on the spurious basis of their parents' and grandparents' racial oppression.

What is involved here is a recasting of the history of immigration, from a narrative of group after group rising and becoming assimilated and Americanized, to the narrative of group after group being enabled to join the oppressors, or those who benefit from whiteness. Many of the facts in these two accounts are the same, but they are now placed in a radically different context, the context being forged by the new lens of "whiteness." This is the creation of a number of young American historians (David Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness*, Noel Ignatiev in *How the Irish Became White*, and others), who have been wielding this concept like a club to beat "whites" into an acknowledgement of what they have gained by the construction of whiteness.

Roediger and Ignatiev write in the context of American labor and working-class history. They want to tell the white American working class that its prosperity, to the degree that it exists, is based on an exclusion—or conversely, on the admission of their groups to the magic circle that permits full participation in American life. Jacobson expands the brief: he writes within the context of immigration history, and he wants to rob immigrants of their self-congratulation for having made it in American society. The Irish, the Jews, the Italians, the Slavs, the Greeks: they all succeed because the privilege of whiteness was in time extended to them. They became, if not Anglo-Saxon, at least Caucasian; and certainly white. But in the light of the socially constructed nature of race, of its fabrication, it might have been otherwise.

Thus the history of American immigration, in Jacobson's account, is radically recast, even as he bases himself (like the older historians who preceded the invention of whiteness) on the same account of how identities were changed from "races" into "ethnic groups," and how groups doubtfully white in the consciousness of old-line Americans were in time accepted as fully white. For the older historians, this is a triumph of American inclusion. For Jacobson, it signifies a morally unworthy gathering within the circle of inclusion denoted by whiteness, so as to reap its benefits.

This reinterpretation marks a third phase in our understanding of immigration. Immigrant history was much ignored until after World War II. The "pioneers" and the "settlers" were central to American history; but "immigrants," for American historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were something else again. They were expected to become Americans like the settlers who preceded them, and they were judged by their capacity to become Americans, that is, by their willingness to put aside foreign languages and foreign cultures, and thereby to become citizens participating in American politics and prospering economically. The fact that certain groups—first the Chinese, then the Japanese—were excluded by law from entering the country or becoming citizens did not particularly challenge these earlier historians' conception of the United States, or play any large role in their thinking. For them, ours was basically an Anglo-American country, and additions to its population were to be evaluated by their closeness to the original stock.

Then there came the revolution in immigrant history associated with the work of Oscar Handlin and his students. It was critical of this minatory evaluation of immigrant groups. After all, they had come to America out of the same motives as the settlers who preceded them; and they were clearly, as the experience (and the films) of World War II indicated, as good Americans (well, almost) as the old stock. The new immigrant history, while it contained an element of resentment at the prejudice and the discrimination suffered by forebears during the period of their immigration and assimilation, was on the whole celebratory. It studied the processes of adaptation and the rate of social mobility of various groups in various cities; and, despite differences among groups, it pronounced the results satisfactory. In Andrew Greeley's studies of the 1960s and 1970s, all immigrant groups, now known as ethnic groups, had come close enough to equal not to raise any difficult questions. The remaining differences were more the reflection of interesting cultural survivals than anything else.

Blacks were not much discussed in these studies. If their social and economic status at the bottom was noted, it could be ascribed to a painful past, to a history that was now being made good through the judicial and civil rights revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s. In the immigrant history exemplified by *Whiteness of a Different Color*, however, blacks are not ignored, and they are not just another ethnic group. They are the heart of the matter, the crucial backdrop against which this history is played out, the key factor that makes the history of immigrant ascent possible.

In this account, immigrant opportunity depends on the immigrants being encompassed by the rubric of whiteness, and on the exclusion of the others. "My point here," Jacobson writes, "is not to equate one racial experience with another, but rather to demonstrate the inadequacy of modern notions of 'ethnicity' in rendering the history of whiteness...." Arguing against "any facile comparisons of the African American experience with the white immigrant experience," he asserts that "various white immigrant groups' economic successes came at the expense of nonwhites," and "they owe their now stabilized and broadly recognized whiteness *itself* in part to these nonwhite groups."

The target of Jacobson's revisionism is larger than the self-conception of immigrants and ethnic groups. He aims at our largest conceptions of American society and American history:

> The saga of European immigration has long been held up as proof of the openness of American society, the benign and absorptive powers of American capitalism, and the robust health of American democracy.... But this pretty story suddenly fades once one recognizes how crucial Europeans' racial status as "free white persons" was to their gaining entrance in the first place; how profoundly dependent their racial inclusion was upon the racial *exclusion* of others....

Jacobson wants to recast "the saga of Europeans' immigration and assimilation in the United States as a *racial* odyssey...." The immigrants may not have known it, but the reason for their success was the color of their skin. They could become Americans because they could become white.

To a degree, we have known this for some time. Historians and sociologists, from W.E.B. DuBois on, have told the heartbreaking story of how black artisans and workers were driven out of their crafts in Northern cities by white prejudice, and by a preference for white immigrants; and this story, as we know from current studies of employers' preferences, is not yet over. Yet Jacobson has very little to say about conflicts between immigrant workers and

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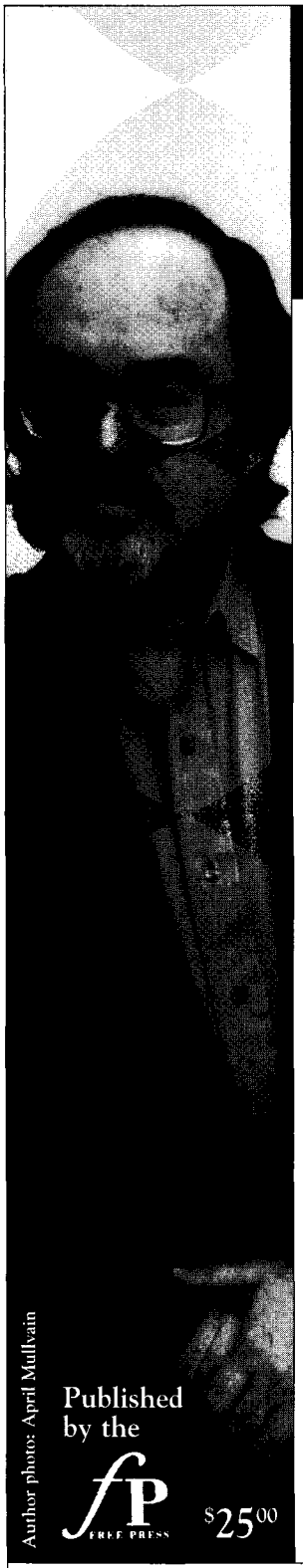
African American workers, about successes and failures in achieving niches in the labor market or in small enterprise. The new historians of whiteness are after grander and more abstract game.

The whiteness thesis is designed to counter the thesis that American values of equality and inclusiveness—present at the beginning in the founding documents, even if they were limited and compromised by slavery and racist prejudice—have steadily expanded their reach to the point where the original promise has been fulfilled, striking every element of exclusion from American law and public practice. This is how Oscar Handlin saw the story. (Or as Jacobson puts it, "in *Race and Nationality in American Life* (1957), in tones now astonishing for their optimism, Oscar Handlin announced that Americans had 'ceased to believe in race' after the 1930s.") I must acknowledge that this is how I, too, saw the story.

But the whiteness theorists want to remake our understanding of American history and society. It is certainly an ambitious enterprise. How does one go about it? For a start, Jacobson places a great deal of weight on a key piece of legislation, the naturalization law of 1790, that limited citizenship to "free white persons." This was expanded after the Civil War to include persons of African descent: native blacks were now citizens, and so the restriction in effect became limited to all others, those who were either nonwhite or non-African.

This led in time to much litigation, well described by Jacobson, as to whether Armenians or Syrians or Sikhs or Hindus or others were eligible for citizenship under naturalization law. The limiting of the right of naturalization to whites and Africans did not end until 1952. The emphasis in this formulation, as Jacobson points out, was more on the idea of free than the idea of "white." That new citizens would be white was taken for granted in a country in which slavery was legal and protected by the Constitution, in which all slaves were black and (almost) all blacks were slaves.

Nor were other nonwhites at issue. The authors of that law were not thinking of Indians, or of Asians. Who was suited to participate in the government of a free country? This was the question that the law set out to answer. And the suitability to govern included many elements besides race. Indeed, race was not necessarily the most crucial trait. Thus the legislators who pondered eligibility for citizenship considered such matters as how long the prospective citizen would have to live in the country, under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FROM THE AUTHOR OF RADICAL SON

THE POLITICS OF BAD FAITH

THE RADICAL ASSAULT ON AMERICA'S FUTURE

BY DAVID HOROWITZ

In the aftermath of the Nazi Holocaust, no progressive intellectual would ignore the link between the racist idea and the "final solution." But no progressive today will recognize the parallel nexus between the utopian idea and the gulags it produced.

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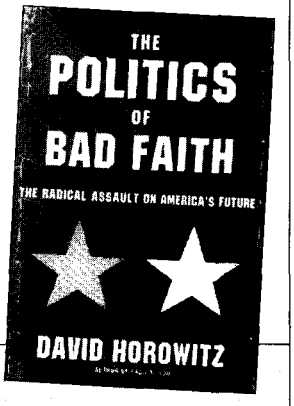

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the assumption that living in this free and self-governing country would teach immigrants from countries governed by monarchs how to become free citizens. Many Americans were doubtful that Catholics or Jews were suitable candidates, but religious limitations, common in pre-Revolutionary colonial charters, never made it into the founding documents of America or into naturalization and immigration law.

With the rise of racial "science" in the nineteenth century, there were new arguments as to why non-whites should not be allowed to become citizens, again based on their incapacity to form part of an enlightened self-governing society. During the nineteenth century, and as the sources of immigration changed to Southern and Eastern Europe, many argued that the new immigrants, coming from despotic nations, were not qualified to become citizens.

Jacobson attaches great significance to this restriction of naturalization to "free white persons," but he ignores two important mitigating features. First, there were no concurrent racial restrictions on immigration itself; and second, the Constitution made citizens of all people born in the United States, regardless of race. But sometimes Jacobson seems to think that the restriction on naturalization implied a restriction on immigration, too, and so he conflates the two: "'Fitness for self-government,' a racial attribute ... became encoded in a naturalization law that allowed Europeans' unrestricted immigration...." Yet all immigration was unrestricted until Chinese exclusion in 1882.

This suggests a bias on Jacobson's part. He seeks to emphasize the patterns of exclusion, and to downplay (or to ignore) principles and laws and constitutional provisions that pointed to inclusion, and were potent over time in facilitating inclusion. And this is not the only serious flaw in Jacobson's thesis. Since he argues for the construction of categories, for the reality of fabrication, and since he believes that the cultural processes of construction and fabrication have determined the fate of people, he looks for his evidence in images. He concentrates on images in cartoons, in novels, in popular writing. He provides lengthy analyses of books in which the racial identities or the ethnic identities of persons are changed, with great consequence for these persons' understanding of the powerful role of race and race prejudice in American thinking and American society. And so we have extended discussions of Arthur Miller's *Focus*, Sinclair Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal*, Laura Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement*, and others.

But representations are not everything. There is also something like reality, and it is slighted in Jacobson's story of the expansion of whiteness. This is a delicate point, but one must recognize that it was possible for persons and groups operating under the enormous constraints of not being white, or not being considered white, to make progress independently of image, regardless of image. It is impossible to deny the terrible reality of racism in America in interpreting what happened in American society, and what is happening. And yet one steadily comes up against the problem of the other nonwhite races.

Admittedly, each race faced a different situation. One must take for granted at the outset that the difficulties that confronted blacks, held in slavery and then granted a formal freedom in a society in which they continued to meet the fiercest prejudice, created for them a far more difficult situation than any other nonwhite group faced. And yet there were various fates under these restraints. The trajectories of Caribbean immigrants in America were different from the trajectories of native blacks. Asian immigrants were excluded from citizenship until 1952, a status that blacks had held since the post-Civil War amendments. Japanese Americans were subjected to the trauma of mass incarceration and the loss of their property.

Where does all this leave the explanation from whiteness? Despite this history, the theorists of whiteness must now take into account a prospect in which Asians, too, are becoming white, in every sense in which whiteness matters. Surely this will make the history of "whiteness" rather more complicated. The theorists of whiteness might retort that this change in the status of Asian groups once again shows how "unnatural," how "socially constructed," this status is. But those who are thinking of the larger contours of American society will ask a different question. What does the "whitening" of these non-white immigrants tell us about the openness of America, about its inclusiveness, about the strength of its founding principles? Is it really proof that the "openness of American society, the benign and absorptive powers of American capitalism, the robust health of American democracy" is, as Jacobson has it, only a "pretty story"?

The force of the whiteness theory lies in the reality of the fate of the African Americans. How can their exclusion in American society, so much more marked than that of immigrant groups, as measured by such indices as residential integration, intermarriage, participation in the economy at levels equivalent to others, be explained? After all, the legal barriers to participation in the North and the West fell away more than fifty years ago, and they were eliminated in the South more than thirty years ago.

There are various possibilities. We can examine the real consequences and characteristics of the regime of slavery and discrimination in shaping American blacks, and in affecting many of them in ways that were not evident, to blacks or to whites, thirty years ago. We can examine these consequences and these attitudes in interaction with the opportunities that were opened up by the civil rights revolution, with changes in popular and elite American attitudes, with the expansion of the American economy.

The whiteness theorists, however, want to short-circuit all such avenues of empirical inquiry. For them, construction is all. The American mind has simply placed blacks in a different category, below the line of participation and acceptance, and that difference determines the other differences. What more do you need to know? As Jacobson asks, how is it that a white woman can give birth to a black baby, but a black woman cannot give birth to a white baby? This is a potent indicator of the special place that African Americans inhabit in American thinking, popular, elite, and official.

And yet this is hardly the end of the story. There is also the matter of groups shaping themselves—constructing themselves, if you wish—in a manner contradictory to prevailing prejudice, and in a manner that alters opinions and attitudes and prejudices. Race may be a matter of construction, but this construction in the individual and the collective mind is not impervious to reality and its vicissitudes. To explain the racial situation in America by recourse to the imagery of modern American culture may be interesting, but it scants a great many changes; and those changes are owed in large part to those early principles that were adopted in a racist and slave-owning society.

The theory of "whiteness" tells us a great deal about our past. But it is being imposed as an explanatory variable upon a present in which its explanatory power is considerably reduced. I fear that its wide adoption as an effort to understand the present situation will undermine the changes, slow as they are, that really are incorporating African Americans, at last, into the society of free and equal persons that was promised to America at its beginning. •

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Sex and the City

By Alan Taylor

The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York by Patricia Cline Cohen

(Knopf, 432 pp., $27.50)

So many elements of this extraordinary story seem so contemporary. A stylish prostitute with a tony clientele is found dead in her burning bed. A trail of circumstantial evidence, including a hatchet and a cloak, implicates a handsome young man with political connections. A fevered and unscrupulous press hypes the case throughout the nation, dwelling upon the lurid combination of illicit sex and deadly violence. An immense throng attends a trial that features a celebrity defense lawyer at the peak of his performance. Appealing to class and gender prejudices, he assails the character of the victim and her friends as vulgar prostitutes, while casting his client as an innocent and misunderstood boy from an upstanding family. A surprise defense witness, an inept prosecution, and a biased judge strengthen the defense's case in the courtroom, but not in the court of public opinion. In a verdict that shocks most of the public, the jury quickly acquits. Although he becomes a hero to other rakish young men, the acquitted reaps continued scorn from moralizing editors, columnists, and readers convinced that the trial was a mockery of justice.

Yet this story of murder and justice denied unfolded in New York City in 1836. It was a place with differences as well as resonances to our own. Although it was the nation's largest city, New York had a population of only 270,000 people. Almost all of them dwelled in brick or wooden buildings of four stories or less clustered in the lower third of Manhattan. Assault-and-battery was common, but not murder. In 1835, the city experienced only seven official homicides. Even the murder of a prostitute, so sadly routine today, could shock the New Yorkers of that day.

As a proportion of the population, prostitutes were more numerous, more conspicuous, and more tolerated than today. At least 1,500 prostitutes, and perhaps as many as 10,000, worked in the city, most at low rates in the squalid slums of the Five Points District. Yet a substantial number of them charged premium prices ($3 to $5) and belonged to fashionable brothels woven into reputable neighborhoods. Helen Jewett lived and worked in four different brothels, all in the expensive Fifth Ward, "the city's cultural and political center." City Hall and the Park Theatre were both a five-minute walk from her last residence at 41 Thomas Street. The property belonged to John R. Livingston, who belonged to the state's most prestigious family; his brother (who also lived in the neighborhood) had been Secretary of State in Andrew Jackson's administration. The fashionable prostitutes were welcomed into the city theaters, which reserved special and conspicuous sections for the women to meet their clients.

Women, not men, ran the brothel business (by leasing buildings from the likes of John R. Livingston). At the fashionable end of the trade, the prostitutes made a good and independent living: $1,500 to $2,000 a year at a time when a young male clerk was lucky to make $300. No other occupation then open to women paid nearly so well or permitted nearly so much autonomy and enterprise—provided, of course, that they met brothel standards and so could escape the grim, cheap life of streetwalking in the Five Points.

No law explicitly forbade selling sex, and so prostitution was not, strictly speaking, illegal. Vigilant police and magistrates could prosecute prostitutes for vagrancy or disorderly conduct. Few New York policemen and magistrates were so vigilant. Prostitutes had much more to fear from gangs of street toughs who occasionally attacked and ransacked the fashionable brothels, smashing furniture and windows, insulting and pummeling the women. These working-class men were exercising both their misogyny and their resentment of class privilege.

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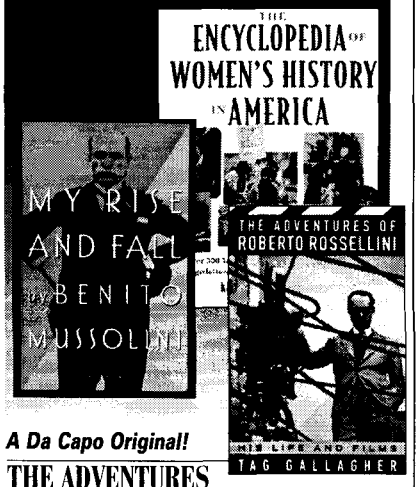
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Patricia Cline Cohen draws us into this alluring mix of the familiar and the strange. In her gripping opening chapter, "Snow in April," Cohen sets the vivid and tragic tone that sustains her entire book. With an accumulation of telling details, Cohen carefully builds in the mind's eye the texture of New York and the diversity of its people. She shifts skillfully from the broader urban scene on a "cold, dark, and wet" Saturday night, April 9, 1836, to the house of ill repute on Thomas Street. She draws readers vicariously into the perspective of Rosina Townsend, the brothel's operator, as she awoke in the pre-dawn hours of Sunday morning, April 10, and suspiciously began to wander through the premises. A puzzling and troubling set of clues drew Townsend up the stairs to the bedroom door of Helen Jewett. Pulled open, the door unleashed a billowing cloud of smoke from the burning bed that held her bloody and singed corpse. The alarm quickly spread through the house, and then into the neighborhood, and then into the city. Even the mayor dropped by to investigate the investigation.

Suspicion immediately focused on Richard P. Robinson, nineteen years old, a moody, dashing, and boyish clerk in a fashionable Manhattan cloth store. Townsend and two other prostitutes identified him as Helen's evening guest. An habitué of brothels, Robinson was well known to the three women as Helen's primary and most volatile customer. The hatchet and the dark cloak found behind the brothel drew the two investigating policemen to Robinson's workplace and then to his boarding-house.

They awakened the suspect and hurried him back to the brothel to view the confusion and the corpse. "The officers scrutinizing his reaction were amazed to note his composure and impassivity," Cohen writes. Two doctors quickly performed an autopsy and assisted a hastily convened coroner's jury (twelve men plucked from the gathering crowd in the street) in ruling that Jewett's death was a homicide "by the hand of Richard P. Robinson." Despite his protestations of innocence, the officers arrested Robinson and hurried him off to the nearby jail.

Cohen reveals that Robinson belonged to a new, large, and rapidly growing social group: aspiring young men living on their own in cheap and unsupervised boarding-houses in the city, far from their middle-class homes and parents in the small towns of New England and upstate New York. Robinson came from Connecticut, where his prosperous and reputable father was a farmer, a real estate speculator, and a state legislator. By day, the clerks were closely monitored by moralistic and tight-fisted entrepreneurs determined to teach them the values of sobriety, thrift, hard work, and self-sacrifice. By night, when work was over, the clerks were on their own, set free to taste the city's amusements and vices, especially the overlapping realms of the theater and the brothel. For an impecunious clerk, commonly paid $4 a week, the $5 fee of a fashionable prostitute invited a cunning for embezzlement at work. Robinson never seemed to lack for money.

By the end of the week, virtually every newspaper reader in the Northeast knew of Jewett's murder and Robinson's arrest. The case, Cohen observes, "afforded an opportunity to contemplate the forbidden, the taboo life behind the velvet curtain of her brothel. Sexuality infused this crime, inspiring both attraction and repulsion." The alluring combination of sex, violence, and mystery attracted a voracious and competitive press, especially the new, cheap, mass-market newspapers that sold for a penny.

The aggressive, resourceful, and often unscrupulous editor of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett, seized the lead by visiting the crime scene (setting a new precedent) and by focusing on his own reactions as the essence of the story. He invited readers to share his overwrought feelings as he viewed the perfect corpse: "It was the most remarkable sight I ever beheld—I never have, and never expect to see such another.... The perfect figure—the exquisite limbs—the fine face—the full arms—the beautiful bust—all—all surpassing in every respect the Venus de Medicis.... For a few moments I was lost in admiration at this extraordinary sight—a beautiful female corpse—that surpassed the finest statue of antiquity." Bennett put the dead woman, rather than the living suspect, at the center of the tale, where she remained throughout the following uproar and trial.

By our standards, the press showed remarkably little interest in the apparent murderer, while it lavished newsprint to debate the origins, the personality, and the appearance of the murdered. Cohen tries to right the narrative balance by uncovering the suspect's past and personality, as the newspapers never did. Still, it is Jewett who dominates the story, commanding our greatest curiosity as readers, just as James Gordon Bennett intended.

A voyeur but more, Bennett also took inventory of Jewett's room and found surprising evidence of literary taste and cultural aspiration. She collected the romantic works of Byron, Scott, and Bulwer-Lytton, subscribed to highbrow literary periodicals, and decorated her walls with theatrical playbills and a print of Byron. Her worktable, "strewn with pens, ink, and expensive writing paper," and her trunk stuffed with over ninety letters to and from her lovers, attested to Helen's elaborate and often refined correspondence. "This had been a girl with not only beauty but talent and wit," wrote Bennett. "She was a remarkable character, and has come to a remarkable end."

Such a prostitute sold newspapers, for she defied the dismissive stereotype of the vulgar and degraded whore, unworthy of a second thought. Rather than dismissing her death as inevitable, inconsequential, and irrelevant to their own lives, readers hungered to know more about her "remarkable character" as well as her "remarkable end." The New York press was willing to look beyond the woman's sordid profession to detect an admirable and poignant character.

The city's editors and readers readily fit Helen into another, more sympathetic phenomenon with a powerful resonance in the culture of America in the 1830s. She was, they insisted, first the tragic victim of seduction and then the tragic victim of murder. Once virtuous, and still talented and sympathetic, she had been driven from respectable society by some heartless cad in her home state of Maine or in Boston. After stealing her irretrievable virginity and her precious reputation, the villain had cast her adrift. Despoiled and without a husband, Helen had no alternative but flight into the dangerous demimonde of prostitution. It was her seducer, then, who was the ultimate murderer, the man who drove her into harm's way at 41 Thomas Street.

The story of a good girl ruined by seduction in New England before she moved to the big city appealed to the New York press, for it cleared their city of the ultimate responsibility for her death. And since the New York version shunted the blame onto the predatory men and the hypocritical leaders of New England, the Boston and Maine papers preferred to insist that Helen Jewett was an ungrateful and promiscuous girl; that she had betrayed her generous and kindly guardians before gravitating to her natural milieu, the wicked brothels of Gotham. In this hostile version, Helen solicited her own seduction and reaped the just deserts of social exile and violent death. The newspapers and

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their readers debated, in Cohen's words, "Were such women victims of men, or their victimizers?"

Picking up where the newspaper stories left off, Cohen painstakingly tracks down and interprets the diverse, scattered, and often fragmentary local records for central Maine to reconstitute the parentage and the early life of Helen Jewett. Anyone who has worked with such documents will marvel at Cohen's ingenuity, persistence, and judiciousness in distilling from them the life and the personality of a poor and obscure girl. Cohen canvasses every possible source, many unpublished and scattered in obscure, local archives: genealogies, Revolutionary War muster rolls and pension applications, probate inventories, local newspaper stories and advertisements, ephemeral pamphlets, tax rolls, land deeds, and town meeting records. Her mastery of such disparate sources—both literary texts and numeric data—is the mark of a consummate historian. By reproducing the evidence in colorful detail, and by assessing its strengths and its weaknesses frankly, Cohen draws readers into the excitement of the historian as detective. Her book is the very model of sophisticated historical research and lucid historical interpretation.

Cohen reveals that "Helen Jewett" was an alias, the latest in a series that included Helen Mar (in Boston) and Maria Stanley (in Portland). For the first seventeen years of her life, she was Dorcas Doyen, the daughter of an impoverished, drunken, and transient shoemaker. Born in 1813 in the hard-scrabble, back-country town of Temple, Maine, Dorcas and her family moved on to the nearby commercial town of Augusta, on the Kennebec River. There, in 1826, the girl joined the wealthy and genteel household of Judge Nathan Weston, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Court, as a resident servant. There she was indulged with an education and with the leisure to read, and treated in these ways as if she had been a surrogate daughter.

In 1830, Dorcas left the Weston household precipitously, apparently after losing her virginity. She drifted off, in succession, to Portland, Boston, and New York, living as a prostitute in all three cities, eventually becoming Helen Jewett. But what had propelled her out of service to gentility and out of Maine? In September 1827, the travel writer Mrs. Anne Royall called at the Weston mansion in Augusta. She later recalled: "When I knocked at the door of judge Western [sic], it was opened by a little girl ... who saluted with inimitable

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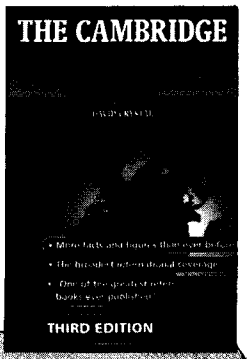

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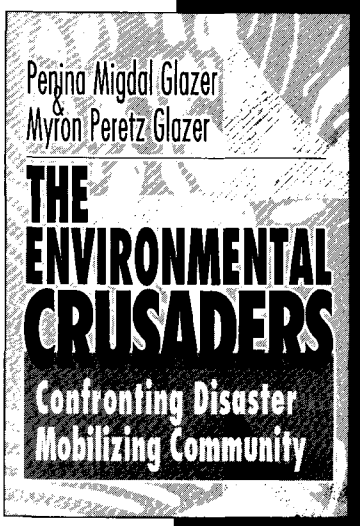

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sweetness, and with a graceful wave of her hand, invited me to take a seat on the sofa. I knew her to be a servant, which surprised me the more. Stepping back as she opened the door, with an air of the most accomplished lady—I forgot to ask for the Judge, but began to question the little girl respecting herself."

Evidently the young Dorcas Doyen was a keen observer and mimic of the genteel ways on display in her master's household. In 1828, she could read these words of praise in Royall's latest volume, readily available in the Augusta bookstore of Harlow Spaulding. Cohen speculates that "Dorcas Doyen, the girl who read books to imagine a world beyond the pantry and laundry room, had now become a character in a book. The experience was bound to unleash ambitions—inappropriate ambitions for a poor shoemaker's daughter in Maine of the 1820s."

In nineteenth-century America, pious moralists castigated the reading habits of young people, who preferred romantic novels to devotional tracts. Novels bred dangerous illusions, they warned, and made the young discontented with reality. It was especially disruptive to social order and public morals to awaken the imagination of girls from the lower classes. A servant girl might take on airs, and imagine an escape from her dreary station by means of romance and marriage to a dashing gentleman. Such a girl would all too readily succumb to the wiles of unscrupulous rakes, who would blast her reputation forever. And who would tend the laundry?

Historians are no longer pious moralizers of the traditional sort, and they tend to take with a grain of salt the nineteenth-century alarms against novels. But not Patricia Cohen. In her view, reading really did launch Dorcas Doyen on the path to seduction, prostitution, and untimely death. By imagining herself to be more than a servant girl, to be the equal of her master's children, Dorcas set herself up for a fall, for she put herself on a collision course with her society's codes of sex and class.

Occasionally, Cohen's dogged research treats dead ends with more respect and detail than they seem to warrant. In her determination to unmask the rogue who ruined Dorcas Doyen, for example, Cohen devotes an entire chapter to an assessment of four suspects in the seduction. In each case, she judiciously sifts the possibilities, but only one of the four men seems to merit such sustained examination. A single man, a bank cashier, and the owner of an Augusta bookstore near the Weston mansion, Harlow Spaulding best fits Helen Jewett's hints at the identity of her seducer.

Still, at greater length and with diminishing plausibility, Cohen proceeds to explore the three extreme long shots, including Judge Weston himself. A boy named Sumner is given four pages, although he almost certainly existed only in a fantastic biography of Helen Jewett produced in 1849 by a disreputable journalist named George Wilkes. Cohen determines that there was a boy named Sumner True born in the same year and the same town as Dorcas Doyen; but beyond the coincidence that Wilkes named a character "Sumner," not a shred of evidence places True and Doyen together in Augusta in the 1820s. Indeed, the details of Wilkes's story ring just a tad suspect: after allegedly despoiling Dorcas, Sumner shipped out to sea, bound for the Philippines, where he killed a Jesuit priest, landed in jail, but escaped with the help of the American consul. Cohen remarks that "a search of the manuscript records of the American consulate in the Philippines shows that the appointed consul on duty in the 1820s left his post for the years from 1825 to 1829 for health reasons, and no one took his place. Clearly Wilkes invented that aspect of the story." The manuscript records of the American consulate in the Philippines for the 1820s! How many historians would have sought them, and found them? One of the many pleasures of Cohen's book is the full and fair invitation that she extends to readers to evaluate her own reading of the difficult evidence.

The trope of permanent ruin by seduction was powerful but relatively new in the American Northeast of the early nineteenth century. In Augusta in the preceding generation, a third of the first births were conceived well before marriage—and no enduring odium attached to either man or woman. "It was not uncommon for an unwed mother to make a reasonably good marriage to another man a few years later," Cohen remarks. That changed by the 1820s. Seduction and abandonment became more common as young men became more geographically mobile over longer distances in the rapidly expanding nation. The reaction of popular literature and the courts was a new insistence that the seduced and abandoned woman was ruined for life. Since the culture had begun to consider men as naturally lusty and women as naturally "passionless," the latter bore the principal responsibility for the inhibition of sexuality and the primary burden for failure.

The wronged Dorcas Doyen's problem was that she had developed a longing for the genteel life. She hoped to secure a genteel marriage, but her prospect seduced and abandoned her, debarring her forever from the high society of her New England town. After this disaster, she might have lapsed back into obscurity by moving far from Augusta to become a mill girl in Massachusetts or a farm wife in Illinois. She opted instead for prostitution. It alone promised the level of independence and income that could furnish her with the high life: silk dresses, fine jewelry, theater tickets, gold-edged writing paper, and bottles of champagne.

By becoming the expensive and selective New York City prostitute known as Helen Jewett, Dorcas Doyen could afford the props of a lady's life. Since she had learned the customs of gentility by long and careful observation, Helen Jewett could play-act the ruined lady, which was especially alluring to the sort of young gentlemen who sought in a prostitute what they could never accept in a wife. Contrary to the prevailing myth of the seduced woman as innocent and passive victim, Helen Jewett chose her life of prostitution.

Cohen presents numerous long extracts from the trove of letters that was discovered in Helen Jewett's trunk in 1836 (they were published in 1848–1849, but they have now vanished), thereby inviting readers to share in their secrets and in her analysis. The letters reveal Jewett's talent for self-invention, for self-dramatization, and for the manipulation of genteel but callow young men. The letters' most surprising revelation is that Jewett expected, demanded, and obliged her clients to treat her as their one and only love. She rebuked one wayward customer, "my heart is full to bursting, that another should have been preferred to me, when you have so often assured me that you loved no one else, and I think every one with me must acknowledge the singular and powerful force with which a girl innocent in herself clings to the belief of innocence in her lover."

The prostitute as innocent, the prostitute as jealous lover: it was not an easy role to play. The submission of her clients was especially extraordinary because they had to pay her very well and to accept the fact that she had multiple paying partners. As Helen Jewett, Dorcas Doyen reversed the sexual double standard that had driven her from Augusta, while shielding Harlow Spaulding's name and reputation. She may have lost in Augusta, but until the very end she prevailed in New York. She

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chose who she slept with, she got top dollar for it, and she enjoyed the romantic submission of her clients.

Far from seeking "obligation-free sex," Helen Jewett and her partners participated in "emotionally intimate, romantic relationships." With one conspicuous exception, "her clients presented themselves as respectful, even adoring men." They had to "court and flatter her, write love letters, and bring gifts." But, if they played by her rules, she rewarded men with her adoring attention and her eloquent flattery. "In you," Helen assured one client, "I found high, generous, noble, independent feelings, such as I had never before met with. A woman should perhaps blush to make the avowal, but I saw and loved you, and my life became a new object, and when I say that I loved you truly, devotedly, disinterestedly, and still do, I only speak the truth, and you can yet be to me all that I in my fondness have wished you were." Cohen explains that "her plan was to make each customer feel especially beloved."

Helen had learned that sex alone sold cheap; men would part with a lot of money only for a fantasy that demanded much of them. Her entrepreneurial stroke of genius was to turn her seduction into her greatest asset. She exuberantly embroidered her past to exaggerate her gentility—inventing, for example, a boarding school education in French, Italian, and music. She also invested her seduction with all the pathos that she could muster; she had discovered that the story of her fall from the highest social rank drove men mad with desire. They longed to protect her *and* to relive the role of seducer. One enraptured client, a newspaper reporter, wrote, "What a prize the villain had who seduced you at the Boarding School. How I should liked [sic] to have been in his place!" The pose of talented and innocent victim looking for that one true friend and lover was very good for business.

Only Richard P. Robinson saw through her, assuring a friend that New York's prostitutes "can tell piteous tales of their wrongs and sufferings,—tricks of the trade, tho',—tricks of the trade, I do assure you." Robinson alone could violate Jewett's rules and get away with it. They met in June 1835, and for two months he conformed to her demanding expectations, and reaped the rewards. But thereafter their relationship became volatile: often angry, frequently reconciled, never entirely ruptured. Cohen observes that "they both lived on—indeed, thrived on living on—an emotional edge. Both experienced an

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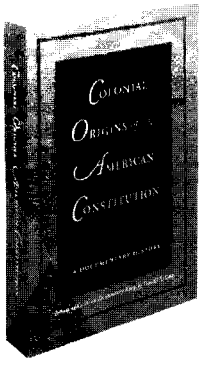

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Donald S. Lutz is Professor of Political Science at the University of Houston.

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intensity of feelings, not merely romantic or sexual longing, but dark, moody, depressive feelings as well, that they both enjoyed giving vent to."

Yet the pleasure was increasingly attended by pain, especially for Jewett. Finally she had met her match. She could easily send away dull and doting George P. Marston, but she could not live without the boyishly handsome, deceitful, moody, cunning, and arrogant Richard P. Robinson. And Robinson, who was used to seducing and abandoning young women, was increasingly uneasy with his inability to make a clean break from Jewett.

At last, at the end of March 1836, he sought that rupture by returning her letters and by demanding his letters in return. Jewett reluctantly promised to do so, but when she delayed, he recalled her previous threats to expose his deepest secret to the world if he ever left her. That terrible secret was probably that he padded his paltry salary by stealing from his employer. Jewett should have remembered the tone of menace in a few of his last letters: "I *have* feelings over which I have no control, and which, if trifled with in any way, would make me unhappy and almost crazy." Instead, on the night of April 9, she welcomed Robinson into her room and into her bed, assuming another reconciliation. Under his long dark cloak he hid a hatchet that he had stolen from his workplace. "Sometime between eleven at night and three in the morning, Robinson killed Jewett with a hatchet blow to the forehead," Cohen concludes.

Although he was arrested and tried, Robinson got away with murder. His employer hired Ogden Hoffman, the best criminal defense lawyer in New York, who argued that the vicious prostitutes had killed Helen in a fit of jealousy and then had framed his client. The testimony of a surprise witness provided Robinson with a shaky alibi: a grocer testified that the defendant had been buying cigars on the night of the murder. It also helped Robinson's cause that the courtroom was packed with his peers, rowdy young clerks who openly rooted for their new hero. Best of all, Judge Ogden Edwards (a grandson of the famous theologian Jonathan Edwards) was openly contemptuous of the testimony of prostitutes, and he instructed the jury to ignore it.

The prosecutor did his part by neglecting to summon the men who had been at 41 Thomas Street on the night of the murder. As gentlemen, their testimony might have confirmed that of the lowly prostitutes. As gentlemen, their bodies had to be kept out of the courtroom and their names out of the newspapers. Disgusted by the hypocrisy, Cohen seems to take vindictive pleasure in the belated justice of exposing those men by publishing their names.

The trial lasted five days, a long proceeding by nineteenth-century standards. On the fifth day, the defense and the prosecution dedicated over ten hours to their closing arguments, about a fifth of the total time devoted to the case. Like all juries of that day, this jury was composed of twelve white men belonging to the shopkeeper class and the professional class: the employers of clerks like Robinson. After deliberating for at least eight minutes and perhaps for fifteen minutes, the jury returned with a verdict of not guilty. The courtroom erupted with applause.

Acquitted in the courtroom, but convicted in the press, Robinson soon left New York and then New England, bound for east Texas: the violent frontier land of escape from the law, the press, wives, and memories. There he assumed the name of Richard Parmalee and prospered as the operator of a saloon (Cohen tracked down his account book), the deputy clerk of the county court, and the owner of a stage coach line. Marriage to a rich widow with a score of slaves and a plantation made Parmalee one of the ten richest men in the boom town of Nacogdoches. As he became a pillar of the community, Parmalee gradually talked more freely, but always disingenuously, about his brush with the law and with notoriety. He died in Louisville, Kentucky in 1855, while traveling back to New England for a visit. In an obituary, *The New York Times* identified Parmalee as Robinson and insisted that he had died, in Cohen's words, "ranting and raving and speaking often of a Helen Jewett." Probably too good to be true, Cohen thinks.

And what of Helen Jewett? In a perverse way, Robinson's acquittal served her well. Since the jury's verdict defied abundant evidence and public opinion, the acquittal denied the case closure, keeping it alive in the public imagination as a powerful and intriguing mystery. In death, and especially in justice denied, Jewett garnered a large and mostly sympathetic celebrity, far beyond even her own dreams of grandeur. No other Maine shoemaker's daughter ever became so famous. As Cohen writes, "She was her own self-made character, and all but the final stage of her literary career was under her own control. That final stage came after her death, when she truly passed over the line into fiction and became a tragic but exciting figure rendered in pamphlets, stories, and short novels." And on into the histories and the historical novels of this century, including a prominent role in Gore Vidal's *Burr*.

Her physical remains fared less well. Later in the nineteenth century, her graveyard was obliterated to make a city park. In 1972 a backhoe, remaking the park into a playground, broke open the forgotten graves. "But Helen Jewett did not meet that backhoe," Cohen writes. "She was not in Walker Park ... nor St. John's Burying Ground, not for long anyway. Four nights after her burial, medical students went at her grave with spades and pickaxes, removed her body in a bag, and carted it off for dissection at the College of Physicians and Surgeons on Barclay Street. A short time later, the *Herald* reported, her 'elegant and classic skeleton' hung in a cabinet at the medical school."

Cohen's book tells an unforgettable story with power and with dignity. Cohen's writing is also refreshingly free of postmodernist doubts about her authority as a historian to seek the truth. She knows that Richard P. Robinson was guilty and she demonstrates it. Indeed, one of Cohen's greatest strengths is her frank, no-nonsense voice as a narrator who does not shrink from judging her subjects. "Even in his relationship with Helen Jewett, George Marston evinced signs of being something of a dolt," she writes. "He was only seventeen and several months into a relationship with a woman light years ahead of him in her ability to manage both feelings and people."

Cohen has an exquisite sense for detecting and unmasking the absurd and the disingenuous. After citing James Gordon Bennett's fulsome description of Helen Jewett's statuesque corpse, she calmly observes: "To keep this rapturous vision of a dead Venus so pure, he shrewdly neglected the autopsy incisions made seven hours earlier, which surely disfigured the dead girl's chest and abdomen. Her 'beautiful bust' had been slit down the middle and probably peeled back to enable Dr. Rogers to reach her lungs, and no amount of skilled repair work could have concealed that laceration. Bennett's rhetorical strategy favored a sexualized corpse over a mutilated one." Unsentimental and candid, Cohen confidently guides readers into the dark recesses of a great American tragedy.

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CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 5*

Voting Fields," August 17 & 24). At the polling stations I visited on Election Day, I too witnessed no obvious fraud.

But she failed to mention the most remarkable feature of the elections: the average voter was engaged and had a positive attitude toward the process. Despite the pre-election shenanigans of the ruling CPP party, the people turned out to vote at rates of over 90 percent. Despite the reports of violence, the streets of Phnom Penh were full of motorcades and political activities in the days leading up to the election. Throughout my stay in Cambodia, I posed the question, "Have you felt intimidation?" to dozens of people. Without exception, the answer was "no." In short, it seemed to me that the people felt they could vote freely for whomever they chose. And the count appeared to be fair, too.

PHILIP YATES
Wilsonville, Oregon

Taking sides

To the editors:

Congratulations to Robert Kagan for his definitive demonstration of the worthlessness of William Bundy's book ("Disestablishment," August 17 & 24). No one on the planet has less standing to attack the Nixon foreign policy than one of the principal architects of the Kennedy-Johnson adventure in Vietnam, the greatest disaster in American foreign policy in the half-century since 1945. When Nixon and Kissinger took office on January 20, 1969, they inherited 550,000 American troops mired in Vietnam, with no strategy either to win or to get out. While extricating us from Vietnam, they managed simultaneously to put in place the main agenda of U.S. foreign policy for the next two decades.

I served on Kissinger's NSC staff, so I make no pretense of being neutral. But Kagan, I suggest, could have gone further. Some of the same points he made about Bundy's after-the-fact conversion to liberal dove could have been made about the neoconservatives, whose critique of Nixon from the right (also after-the-fact) Kagan endorses. In Nixon's first term, when his policies were set, most of the neocons were assaulting Nixon from the left. Even a magazine like *Commentary*, for example, was in 1971 openly welcoming a Vietcong victory. When the administration needed support for a strong policy in Vietnam, or vital defense programs, or resistance to the Soviet geopolitical offensive, the neocons were either nowhere or on the wrong side (Senator Henry Jackson being an honorable exception). Paleoconservatives, meanwhile, had given up on Vietnam and were not an effective force. Throughout the Nixon and Ford periods, Congress was dominated by the left, and the media were a liberal monopoly far more so than today. There was no effective political force to Nixon and Kissinger's right; they were the right. The notion that they had an option for a militantly anti-Communist policy without precipitating a near civil war at home is delusional. Kagan, alas, is too young to remember what it was like.

PETER W. RODMAN
Washington, D.C.

Make him king

To the editors:

Those of us who, like Charles Lane, fear a grim future for President Clinton might do well to recall King David ("First Fibber," August 31). David not only committed adultery with Bathsheba but sent her husband, Uriah, to the front so that he would be killed—something surely far worse than Clinton's affair with Lewinsky. Yet David, as we know, was not only pardoned after confessing his sin but remains still today the most beloved of ancient Israel's rulers.

PHILIP DOOLITTLE WALKER
Santa Barbara, California

TRB *continued from page 6*

arguments that range from the plausible to the contorted to the embarrassing. On the plausible end is the observation that what Clinton did to Lewinsky (or, rather, what he invited her to do to him) is not harassment for the simple reason that it was clearly consensual, while what feminism opposes is coerced sex and unwanted come-ons. But that, of course, leaves out Paula Jones, whose account of what happened in the Excelsior Hotel now seems entirely believable given what we know of Clinton's m.o. It's true that Jones's legal claim of quid pro quo punishment for not accommodating Clinton didn't wash, since she continued to be promoted on schedule. But the weakness of sexual harassment charges has not necessarily been an impediment to rallying behind accusers in the past, whether in a spirit of sisterhood or of brazen partisanship. And then there's Kathleen Willey, whose allegations of unwanted groping the White House has tried, with only limited success, to discredit.

On the embarrassing side are the various giddy outbursts in which feminists make exceptions for Clinton because he's cute. (Remember *The New York Observer*'s "supergal" summit, wherein Erica Jong declared that she wants a president who's "alive from the waist down" and rhapsodized about "swallowing the presidential come"?) And equally embarrassing in their own way are younger feminists' attempts to portray Monica Lewinsky as a junior power broker in thong undies—an icon of female agency, in full command of her hair, her destiny, and her man. But it's not Lewinsky's power that's being exerted here; it's Starr's. Having been consigned to the grim half-life of the walking punch line, poor jobless, Clinton-less, clueless Monica can't even generate interest in her memoir, since the Starr report gave all the juicy bits away.

So what if one or two feminist leaders decided to try to reconcile their hard line on Republican Lotharios with their soft spot for Clinton not by turning on Clinton but by considering that maybe they were wrong in the past? What if they were to say that the invasions of privacy and encroachments on free speech and now genuinely grave political consequences of the aggressive pursuit of sexual harassment do worry them, and that we need to consider whether social sanctions might be more effective instruments of reform than legal proceedings? This is a tall order, but it's far more promising than continuing to insist that, shucks, he's just our Bill.

MARGARET TALBOT

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God is a dangerous idea—whether animistic or vitalistic, theistic or deistic—perverting justice in ethics and politics. Of ancient philosophies Epicureanism alone disposed of this problem with coherent doctrines about chance/necessary interaction of atoms, about evolutionary development, and about basic biological drives. The historical Jesus agreed more with this than with Judaism—more atheist/realist than theist/idealist—as indicated by a recently unearthed document that claims to be enigmatic *ipsissima verba* of Jesus noted by an evidently puzzled student who wandered with him. Jack Hannah corroborates this claim with other independent ancient documents. All pertinent texts and commentary are provided.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

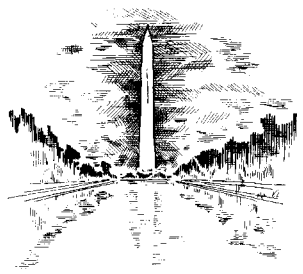
Historical correctness

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS'S ANNALS of Communism series is perhaps the most authoritative source of archival revelations from the former Soviet Union. It was established by executive editor Jonathan Brent to introduce the public to new information about the history of communism, and it already includes several important works. One is *The Secret World of American Communism*, which showed, on the basis of Soviet documents, that the American Communist Party was a creature of Moscow. Another is *The Unknown Lenin*, edited by Richard Pipes, which confirmed that Lenin was a mass murderer who paved the way for Stalin.

SO, WHEN VLADIMIR BROVKIN, A brilliant historian who has written three books on Soviet history and edited two others, was approached by Brent in 1997 about editing several volumes on the Soviet Gulag, he felt honored. Brent told Brovkin that Pipes and Robert Conquest had enthusiastically endorsed his selection. Brent asked Brovkin to submit a proposal; Brovkin sent a seven-page draft arguing that "the guiding principle for all the documents should be that they explain how and why a monstrous system of mass terror came into being, developed, and ultimately was phased out." Brent circulated Brovkin's proposal to the series' advisory board—whereupon Yale decided not to offer him the job after all. In an August 19 letter, Brent informed Brovkin: "While I strongly support your work and your point of view, I cannot disregard the nearly unanimous opinion of my advisory committee. It is therefore impossible for me to offer you the position."

WHY DID BRENT REVERSE HIMSELF? Largely because the Soviet studies field has been captured by revisionists who dismiss as cold war humbug the notion that the Soviet Union was a totalitarian country. Two such historians are on Brent's advisory committee. In the 1980s, the University of Chicago's Sheila Fitzpatrick wrote of the "high social mobility" of the Stalin era, while Professor J. Arch Getty of the University of California at Riverside declared in his dissertation that "thousands were executed" in the purges. As a student at Oberlin College in the 1980s, I was startled by the pervasiveness of such views among professors and students. Reading *Alexander Dolgun's Story: An American in the Gulag* had been enough to turn me into a cold warrior in sixth grade. Meeting Brovkin, who taught at Oberlin for a couple of years, actually refined my hawkish views: he was a social-democratic anti-Communist. His first book argued that the real opposition to the Bolsheviks came from the intellectual Marxists—the Mensheviks. At the same time, Brovkin attacked, by name, U.S. revisionists who defended the Bolsheviks.

WHEN BROVKIN CONTACTED ME about the Yale impasse, I started to realize that almost nothing had changed despite the collapse of the Soviet Union. The more I read, the weirder Soviet studies seemed. The names of the reviewers of Brovkin's proposal have been erased from their reports, but their words are still shocking. One reviewer wrote: "You threaten the scholarly reputation of the entire project because of its excessively 'anti-Bolshevik' tone.... I have no doubt that the system was repressive and that millions suffered and died at its hands. But do you really want to publish three volumes of documents that do nothing else but beat this fact into the reader's consciousness." The reviewer concluded: "And let's be clear about it; you will piss off a lot of people, even more than were angry about the Pipes volume." Another reviewer observed that the prisoners in the Gulag were sent there "in accordance with the laws of the land."



DEFENDING HIS DECISION, BRENT says that not all the scholars who objected to Brovkin were revisionists. One such "moderate" board member, who asked not to be named, told me that "there's a general sense that, while [Brovkin] is an energetic and assiduous researcher, he tends to decide cases beforehand. A general indictment of the Soviet experience, which he's done before, would not shed new light on the issue." Another moderate, Mark von Hagen of Columbia University, told me more "dirt" on the Soviet system would not be helpful. Brovkin would simply present a "black-and-white view" by searching out documents that "reinforce his own views." Von Hagen, too, objected to the Pipes volume on Lenin. "There were a lot of other documents he could have brought forward that weren't known." What other documents? I asked. "I just have to assume" there were others, von Hagen replied. Writing in *The Russian Review* recently, von Hagen noted that the Gulag contained "the kinds of criminals who are incarcerated in every viable state." And, in the Spring 1998 *Slavic Review*, Donald J. Raleigh denounced Pipes's attempt "to demonize Vladimir Lenin...."

ACCORDING TO BRENT, "IF BROVKIN were indeed the best Gulag scholar, then nothing would shake me." What this seems to mean is that, while Brovkin may be the most prolific scholar of his generation, he does not have the stature of a Pipes or Conquest. Therefore, Brent caved. Brent also says that the Gulag is not Brovkin's field and that his Russian counterparts wouldn't work with him on the project. Brovkin counters that he has studied thousands of secret police documents from the 1920s and 1930s for his new book, *Russia After Lenin*. As for the Russian historians, Brovkin says, "They're even more anti-Communist than we are." Pipes says: "In superb scholarly work Brovkin has shown how incompetent the revisionist historians were. They're paying him back."

ARE PIPES AND BROVKIN BEING paranoid about the power of the revisionists—is Brovkin, as Raleigh put it in *Slavic Review*, "fight[ing] a war on a historiographical front that exists largely in the editor's imagination"? Well, Sheila Fitzpatrick is president of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies. And consider the comments of Cambridge historian Chris Ward in *Slavic Review* about Robert Thurston's *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia* (also published by Yale): "Virtually all those now working on the Soviet Union in the 1930s accept, at the very least, that the phenomenon of purging was complex and that the general secretary's role in the process was deeply problematic. Not so outside the profession. As Thurston notes in his conclusion, the mass media persist in dealing with Stalinism by presenting 'images of unlimited horror' that 'serve to vindicate history and politics in the West, itself a construct of virtue in contrast to Soviet malice.'" With revisionism still so influential, Brovkin has been unable to find a full-time teaching position since Harvard denied him tenure in a controversial and dubious decision. He is now at American University, helping direct a study of Russian crime. Conquest has it right: "The treatment of Brovkin, perhaps the West's finest scholar of that period, is a thorough disgrace to academe."

JACOB HEILBRUNN

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